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EVERYTHING FEELS LIKE THE FUTURE BUT US: THE POSTHUMAN MASTER-  
SLAVE DYNAMIC IN JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION ANIME

A Thesis Presented

by

RYAN DALY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
Of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

MAY 2019

Japanese

East Asian Language and Cultures

EVERYTHING FEELS LIKE THE FUTURE BUT US: THE POSTHUMAN MASTER-  
SLAVE DYNAMIC IN JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION ANIME

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Cultures

## DEDICATION

For Petey.

“Our machines are disturbingly lively and we ourselves frighteningly inert.”

-Donna Haraway, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs*

“Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it's all a male fantasy...You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur.”

---Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride*

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I would like to thank my advisor Professor Amanda Seaman for helping me to see this project to fruition. I came to UMass with the dream to study anime and science fiction, and she saw to it that this dream was fulfilled. I would also like to thank Professor Bruce Baird for inspiring and delighting me. They both showed me myriad critical lenses through which one can examine media and culture, and their guidance has proven to be endlessly useful for me. For that, and for all of the faculty in the program, I am deeply grateful. I also want to thank my friends, family, and loved ones who supported me all the way through this journey. It's been a long and challenging experience, and I wouldn't have been able to make it through without them. There are too many to name, so I won't. I love you all. Finally, to my dog Petey, who passed away in the summer of 2018: thank you.

## ABSTRACT

# EVERYTHING FEELS LIKE THE FUTURE BUT US: THE POSTHUMAN MASTER- SLAVE DYNAMIC IN JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION ANIME

MAY 2019

RYAN DALY, B.A. RUTGERS UNIVERSITY NEW BRUNSWICH

M.A. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Amanda Seaman

This thesis is an exploration of the relationships between humans and mechanized beings in Japanese science fiction anime. In it I will be discussing the following texts: *Ergo Proxy* (2006), *Chobits* (2002), *Gunslinger Girl* (2003/2004), and *Mahoromatic* (2001/2002). I argue that these relationships in these anime series take the form of master/slave relationships, with the humans as the masters and the mechanized beings as the slaves. In virtually every case, the mechanized beings are young females and the masters are older human males. I will argue that this dynamic serves to reinforce traditional power structures and gender dynamics in a posthuman landscape. Additionally, I will argue that by enforcing a dynamic of human-male as master and nonhuman-female as slave, science fiction anime works to fortify the “human” as the primary subject of society. This is done to preserve humanism in the overpowering wave of posthumanism.

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## INTRODUCTION

### “EVERYTHING FEELS LIKE THE FUTURE BUT US”

In the January of 2018, I visited a Liz Glynn art exhibition at the Massachusetts Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), entitled *Archaeology of Another Possible Future*. The museum's website states that in this work “Glynn seeks to reconcile the presence of physical bodies and individual subjectivities within this contemporary state” in which people’s lives are becoming increasingly subject to deepening labyrinths of technological and economic abstraction. The exhibit is a large-scale installation, featuring “artifacts” such as wood pallet pyramids, hospital stretchers with vein-systems arranged on top, and other miscellany, all spread out over a gigantic warehouse-style room in the museum. One section of the installation features a series of “news prints” formed into towers with enigmatic phrases written on them, free to take. I took one of these “newsprints,” which read, “Everything feels like the future except us.”<sup>1</sup> From that moment this phrase engrained itself into my thinking, became the ethos that this thesis project would revolve around.

When networked technologies and the engines of industry produce a future where all possibilities are both accessible and boring, the human element—the person left behind—remains. The people who work the machines which drive the future into the dirt remain, unchanged despite radically shifting object and capital relations. Glynn’s exhibit is as much a critique of unregulated capital production as it is a startling reminder that while the world shifts in invisible, unknowable ways, people change very little. It presents a vision of a world in which “nanotechnology” and capital is generated more

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<sup>1</sup> Liz Glynn, *The Archaeology of Another Possible Future*, installation, Mass MOCA, North Adams, MA.

conceptually than materially, creating a status quo in which the idea of “human” becomes simply another data blip in the mass calculus of capitalism.



Figure 1: *Archaeologies of Another Possible Future.*

To a certain extent, to say that “in the future, everything changes except humans” is to evoke a notion of progress—specifically, a progress which has failed in some way. This begs the question: progress towards what? A brief foray into postmodern theory can help answer this question. The postmodern age can be thought of as a period of time resulting from the death of so-called “Grand Narratives.” Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition*, talks about how modernist notions of progress and expansion—that society is progressing towards an optimal “end”—died towards the middle of the 20th century. This consequently led to the birth of “little stories,” or “little narratives”<sup>2</sup> to replace them. He writes that the Grand Narrative “has lost its credibility, regardless of what of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative

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<sup>2</sup> Dino Franco Felluga, *Critical Theory: The Key Concepts* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2015).

narrative or a narrative of emancipation.” We can also understand the death of the grand narrative as precipitating the death of traditional Humanism, which revolves around the centrality and exceptionalism of the human subject, which is itself a kind of grand, or unifying, narrative. In Japan, robots in science fiction are seen as a solution of to the death of the grand narrative, pointing to an optimism which suggests a bright and advanced future. Robots are thought of as bringing the world toward this utopian technological future, and as a result, we can think of this as a replacement grand narrative, or little narrative.

However, in this thesis, I will make it clear that in Japanese science fiction anime, the same human relationships of power, as well as patriarchy, that exist in Japanese society are maintained within these fictional works. The utopia we are ostensibly propelled towards by advanced technologies is always already mired in social baggage which cannot be ignored nor easily resolved. In essence, the “little story” of what humans do to deal with what happens after Humanism becomes an extension of it, furthering systems of oppression thought lost in the postmodern age.

It is therefore necessary to clarify what I mean when I refer to “traditional humanism.” Humanism, as a theoretical vantage point, is concerned with the human as a solid, impermeable agent in the world. Rene Descartes’ “cogito ergo sum” forms the theoretical underpinnings of humanism, specifically, Cartesian Humanism: “I think, therefore I am.” This formulation of the subject positions it as self-creating and self-defining. I think about myself, who I am, what I am doing, and as a result of this, have an individual identity and sense of self. The human-self is thereby made from oppositions which do not intersect: human/animal, self/other, machine/nature, etc. Humans are defined by what they are not, and what they should not become. Taken a bit further, this notion of the self-creating, exclusive subject leads to the idea that the “I” in question is superior to its surroundings. The world outside of the human-subject becomes supine

and open to expansion: war and colonialism are natural extensions of the *cogito-ergo-sum* model of human subjectivity. Naturally, conquest begins and ends with a certain expression of power. When the human subject can take and command that which is outside of itself, then those things fall under its aegis. A hierarchy results, and ideas of mastery and hegemony are generated on the basis that they are moving society towards some grander, unknown end. In other words, masters create slaves in order to better the world. This perspective on slavery and mastery aligns very closely to what the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche writes on the subject. Although I will be going into more specific detail in Chapter 1 of this thesis, it is important that I make clear that my understanding of the master-slave relationship is largely informed by both historical slavery (such as in North America and the Greco-Roman Period) as well Nietzsche's theories.

However, if following Cartesianism this particular idea of the human comes to an end, what comes next must be a way of approaching the world which seeks to describe this new modern condition of living. This condition is one in which grand narratives of mastery and conquest fall apart and are then supplanted by hybrid and technologically mediated existences. This is the background of "posthumanism," a theoretical system which I will explain later in this introduction. The subject of this thesis, therefore, is a paradoxical aspect of posthumanism—of persisting power hierarchies between humans and nonhumans—within the constellation of Japanese pop culture media. I refer to this relation of power as the "Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic." As I have stated, the model of master and slave I will be using is derived from both historical slaveries, as well as Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of slavery as argued in his essay "The Greek State." Here, it is imperative that I make clear that, because I am making a culturally specific argument about Japanese media, I have tried to not rely so much upon scholarship surrounding slavery in the United States and elsewhere in the world. The Masters which I will discuss

in this thesis are “a-historical,” and yet, are informed by power-hierarchies with “real-world” analogues.

For the purpose of this thesis, Masters refer to those whom wield absolute physical and social power over bodies. In turn, Slaves are those dominated bodies, stripped of agency. I will argue that within posthumanism, power structures do not go away or disappear, but rather, are refracted into different forms. Such humanist themes as mastery and domination are re-inscribed onto the relationships between humans and posthumans, and that patriarchy is replicated and imposed onto the gendered bodies of robots, cyborgs, and androids. In essence, my argument is that within posthumanism, where subjectivity is made fluid through a more technologically mediated existence than before, gender and patriarchy remain. Certain subjectivities (androids, robots, cyborgs) are denied in order to allow other subjectivities (humans) to remain retain power. Within Japanese science fiction anime, humans do not change; they bring their social and Cartesian baggage with them.

In my exploration of the relationships between humans and mechanized beings in Japanese science fiction anime, I will be discussing the following texts: *Ergo Proxy* (2006), *Chobits* (2002), *Gunslinger Girl* (2003/2004), and *Mahoromatic* (2001/2002). I argue that these relationships take the form of master/slave relationships, with the humans as the masters and the mechanized beings as the slaves. In virtually every case, the mechanized beings are young females and the masters are older human males. I will argue that this dynamic serves to reinforce traditional power structures and gender dynamics in a posthuman landscape. Additionally, I will argue that by enforcing a dynamic of human-male as master and nonhuman-female as slave, science fiction anime works to fortify the “human” as the primary subject of society. This is done to preserve humanism in the overpowering wave of posthumanism.

The anime that I will be examining in this thesis have not been assembled arbitrarily. The earliest was released in 2001, with the latest in 2006. Within a five-year period, four anime series were released in Japan that in some capacity deal with hierarchical relationships between humans and machines. This moment in culture, therefore, in some way fomented the creation of works which express related views on posthumanism. This period of time also coincides with a period of economic stagnation and deepening social precarity in Japan. Therefore, I argue that these anime series are reacting to their contemporary moment, projecting anxieties of the present into fears of—and fantasies for—the future.

It would then be prudent to give a brief historical overview of this period of Japanese history, including aspects of it which are relevant in our contemporary moment. Following the end of WWII, Japan found itself in economic turmoil. The war—specifically, American firebombing and nuclear weapons—had laid waste to most major cities, such as Tokyo and Nagasaki, as well as the basic infrastructure of the Japanese economy. Following near-annihilation, the next few decades saw Japan on an upswing, with the manufacturing and labor sectors finding great success. This all culminated in the 1980s, during Japan's greatest period of economic prosperity. This economic moment is referred to as a *baburu keizai*, or "Economic Bubble."

Iyoda Mitsuhiro, in his 2010 book *Postwar Japanese Economy: Lessons of Economic Growth and the Bubble Economy*, details the cause of the bubble economy and its immediate aftermath. The economic bubble of the 1980s was characterized by "speculative trading and rising prices in shares and real estate." (Iyoda 69) This, along with "huge trade surplus and deregulation of financial institutions and capital transactions" (Iyoda 76) led to a swelling of the economy, a swell which was ultimately found to be unsustainable (Iyoda 69). In essence, the Japanese economy during this time operated under false pretenses; the promise that the economy was good and



continually growing perpetuated a prophesy of abundance and prosperity. This led to what Iyoda identifies as the “wealth effect” in which “household consumption” grew, and nationwide affluence grew.

The economy was able to grow to this extent because of a large labor market. A class of “salarymen” formed around these labor demands, which came with the promise of lifetime employment. The cultural anthropologist Ann Allison refers to this as the *Kazoku kigyō kan kankei*, or Family Corporate System.<sup>3</sup> Work, during this time, became both a mode of identification and a way of structuring everyday life. The figure of the salaryman grew into a part of his company and developed bonds with both his co-workers and the corporate environment. In another of Allison’s anthropological studies, *Nightwork*, she makes the argument that these salarymen grew to identify with their companies. Masculine identity became predicated upon corporations. Allison details that during this time, gendered spaces structured the everyday, in which offices and external places were masculine, whereas non-working wives of salarymen inhabited internal spaces, such as the home. Japanese society operated in this way during this time—upon this gendered line—girded by the machinations of industry.

In 1990 the bubble burst, and companies, as well as individuals, faced the loss of the huge gains they found during the bubble. Additionally, the stock and housing markets both suffered severely. Several important things resulted from this moment, both economic and social. Construction companies which had benefited from inflated land prices either downsized considerably or fired subcontractors. Larger companies contracted as well, while some folded altogether. It is this fact which most keenly affected the Japanese workforce. These companies had been the entities with which the Family Employment System had aligned. As a result, many salarymen lost both their

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<sup>3</sup> Allison, Anne, *Precarious Japan*, Duke University Press Books: 2013, 22-23.

jobs and their hope for acquiring a guaranteed job. While it is not the case that lifetime employment went away entirely, it remained an institution only for the elite who could graduate from top schools, such as Kyoto University and Tokyo University.

During this time is when the *furita* trend began to proliferate. The term *furita* (Freeter) began, as Allison describes, as a marketing term to describe an employment lifestyle alternative to that of the salarymen (Allison 28). Freeters worked part-time jobs and did not aspire to making careers out of them. They were thought to lead lives that were less stuffy, and more liberated than salarymen, who were thought as “drone-like” in their work-ethic. However, following the bursting of the bubble, growing amounts of people in Japan began to rely upon this model. Working sometimes multiple low-paying and unstable jobs, the Freeter became a condition of the economic reality of Japan in the ‘90s and early ‘00s.

Even into the early 2000s, “things hadn’t yet bounced back.” (Allison 30) The middle class continued to shrink, reeling from housing foreclosures, company restructurings, and liquidations. A sense of the “collapse of everydayness” (Allison 2) brought upon by economic turmoil grew more powerful. The Freeter class also grew larger and more precarious in tandem with this. It is this state of precarity and social/economic uncertainty that breeds the conditions in which these four science fiction anime series were created. One could argue that the literature, art, and media produced during the Heisei period (1989-2019) is collectively a body of work informed, to various degrees, by precarity and the specific social issues engendered as a result of it. Precarity, as Allison describes it marks the loss of “work that is secure; work that secures not only income and job but identity and lifestyle.” (Allison 7) She goes on to claim that, “when so much (of the self and soul) gets absorbed into work, the loss of not having that work (and longing for it) can be all-absorbing too.” (Allison 16) Thus, the loss of regular employment and the anxiety over jobs that are unsecure and pay very little

feed into a sense of social dread: a precarity which infects the psyche of people simply trying to find work and live.

Another considerable factor of precarity during this time is the role of foreign laborers. The immigration of high-skill and short-term IT workers from India and East Asia attempts to fill a vacuum left by Japanese youth people unable to attend high-end universities. A *Japan Times* article from 2000 quotes Takashi Miyajima, a Professor of Sociology at Rikkyo University, saying that “In order to maintain economic strength and welfare standards, Japan will need to import workers to make up for the problem.”<sup>4</sup> Another *Japan Times* article from 2018 details this growing trend as well, showing it as continuing into today.<sup>5</sup> Thus, both the loss of life-time employment, the reliance upon part-time work, and the growing shrinkage of the high-skill labor market met by foreign IT workers compounds into a state in which young Japanese people feel at a loss, with their lives and environment out of their control—a “state where one’s human condition becomes precarious as well.”<sup>6</sup> (Allison 9) However, this happens at the inverse of another development: the Robotics industry.

Jennifer Robertson makes the argument that, while the human sector of Japanese society and economy suffered, robotics flourished. In 2006 “Japan was home to over half of the world’s 1 million industrial robots.”<sup>7</sup> Due to government funding, this sector of the Japanese economy expanded and became more ambitious, while other sectors languished. Robertson noticed that, from her fieldwork:

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<sup>4</sup> Matsubara Hiroshi, “Slump, aging Japan skew foreigner debate.” *Japan Times*, January 4, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Nagata, Kazuaki. “Japan’s IT firms enthusiastically open doors to overseas tech workers.” *Japan Times*, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018.  
<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/11/18/business/japans-firms-enthusiastically-open-doors-overseas-tech-workers/>. Accessed 2/12/19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 9.

<sup>7</sup> Robertson, Jennifer, *Robo Sapiens Japonicus*, University of California Press: 2018, 17.

One prevalent sentiment expressed in conversation and text alike was the sense that humanoid robots were regarded by the public as preferable to foreign laborers, especially caregivers, ostensibly for the reason that unlike migrant and minority workers, robots have neither cultural differences nor unresolved historical (or wartime) memories to contend with, as in the case with East Asians<sup>8</sup>

As I have stated before, the high-skill labor shortage in Japan, in part, was provisionally amended through the importation of foreign labor. Here is an interesting inversion of this: instead of relying upon labor from outside Japan, the robotics industry sought to eliminate the need altogether. And while this never came to fruition in any meaningful way, as I will point out in the conclusion of this thesis, the idea still would not address the underlying issue: precarity in Japanese youth. Robots, in this sense, become an arena of optimistic futurism, in which both the government and technology industries attempt to actualize a future beyond economic and social woes. Robots become the solution to a fundamental lack of control, whereby machine labor endeavors to alleviate a need for human labor. To control robots, as a labor class but also as a social panacea, would ostensibly help to make people feel more human, while at the same time fixing a broken society. The human element in society, however, is less important in this model. Additionally, to do so does nothing to amend the positions of Freeters. As such, I argue that these anime series were born during this period of time of economic and social precarity, with robots as a burgeoning element of modern life, and reflect a certain understanding of the ways in which robots fit into the world. In reality, robots are used for both xenophobic reasons, but also to amend existing social systems which teeter on the

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<sup>8</sup> Robertson, *Robo*, 18/19.

brink of collapse. In anime, robots and other posthuman bodies are used by humans in a similar but different way. They fortify the labor force, but also replace certain human relationships and social roles: as romantic partners, sexual bodies, and soldiers.

Here, I will outline the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic. The easiest way of conceiving of this kind of relationship is to consider the two halves: master-slave and posthuman. The former is made apparent through humanism: it is a relation of power between two people, or two groups of people, in which one dominates the other. The “master” controls the other’s life and mode of existence. For this thesis, I will concern myself with the ways in which the master controls the *body* and *bodily existence* of the slave. As I have previously stated, within humanism we understand this notion of controlling the world and other people as a kind of assertion of one subject over another. In other words, to wield mastery over another is to deny their subjectivity and place them in a subaltern position. The master-slave dynamic functions as an outcropping of humanism. Therefore, it would stand to reason that the collapse of humanism and humanist narratives would dissolve this, and yet, I argue that it does not. One must understand posthumanism in order to find out why.

Posthumanism exists within a vast corpus of literature and theory, and as such, is difficult to confine within a workable definition. Scholars such as Donna Haraway, Anne Balsamo, Vivian Sobchack, and Sharalyn Orbaugh have all contributed to the scholarship, creating an intricate constellation of interrelated fields within feminism, Marxism, science fiction theory, and cultural studies. Posthumanism, in this sense, refers to a larger tradition of critical theory and genre convention which, at its core, posits a world in which the traditional borders between human and machine are in the *process* of or *already have* succumbed to total collapse. Posthumanism seeks to “complicate the humanist boundaries dividing the human from the other-than-human, the subject from

the object, and the self from the other,”<sup>9</sup> in the words of Andrew Lawrence Gilbert from his Ph.D. dissertation *Unuseless Cyborgs: Spiral Posthumanism and Popular Culture in Japan’s Ushinawareta Nijūnen (1990-2010)*. Androids and cyborgs are classic figures of posthuman fiction. However, theorists in the field have claimed that the contemporary era is indeed a posthuman one, due to the spread of highly advanced technologies in nearly every aspect of human existence. In humanism the figure of the Human stands as an impermeable agent, with individual drive and autonomy.

Alternatively, posthumanism supposes that humans, as they have been traditionally conceived, are disappearing, and with that concept, a form of human subjectivity is also being lost. In posthumanism, a new subjectivity is born: one which decenters the human and re-centers peripheral figures as new subjects. These can be robots, cyborgs, or even animals. Thus, the *cogito* model of humanity breaks down and one can begin to think of subjectivity as a broader and more inclusive subject. Things such as mastery and domination break down, for the impermeable and dominating human-subject becomes perforated. The Master blends with the Slave, and posthumanism, as a condition of technologically mediation, becomes a “little narrative” to step in when the grand narrative of humanism breaks down.

The idea of gender within posthumanism also undergoes a transformation. Donna Haraway, in her “Cyborg Manifesto”, states that cyborgs, while born from patriarchy, imperialism, and war, can be appropriated for use as a rhetoric to imagine a human subject unbound from those historical, political, and gendered systems.<sup>10</sup> She

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Lawrence Gilbert, “Unuseless Cyborgs: Spiral Posthumanism and Popular Culture in Japan’s Ushinawareta Nijūnen (1990-2010),” PhD Diss., University of Colorado, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Haraway, Donna. “A Manifesto for Cyborgs.” *The Cybercultures Reader*, Routledge: 2000, 293.

specifically states that the cyborg exists in a “post-gender world.”<sup>11</sup> This is to say that cyborg identities replace the social construction of gender. At the junction of human and technology, binary categories of being, such as man/woman, human/animal, etc. become irrelevant. However, this thesis sides with the critique of Haraway that a cyborgian “post-gender” world cannot exist while patriarchal systems hold the means of technological production. At the core, this thesis poses itself as a rejection of the notion that posthumanism produces or is the product of a post-gender world.

In posthuman fiction, the relationship between humans and posthuman beings elaborates a core truth: that robots, cyborgs, and androids reflect both what we wish to become, and what we are ultimately afraid of becoming. This is why, I argue, that master-slave relationships are able to persist within posthumanism. Out of an anxiety over the diminishing subject position of the human as defined by humanism, the fear of “becoming posthuman” leads to the establishment of stratified hierarchy in order to keep posthumans below humans and within the grip of power, diminishing their subjecthood. Hierarchy functions as a buffer between the human-subject within the *cogito* model and a technological mediated society which seeks to produce beings in defiance of this model. I would like to, then, make the case for this relationship of power within a specific cultural context: Japan. Posthumanism and science fiction have a long history within Japan, an early example (of popular culture) being the manga and anime *Astro Boy*, or *Tetsuwan atomu* (Mighty Atom). Western writers have also written about Japan in this context of technological “progress,” often in techno-orientalist mode.<sup>12</sup> For example, the writer William Gibson, a pioneer of “cyberpunk” literature in the west, wrote in 2001 that

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<sup>11</sup> Haraway, *Cyborg*, 292.

<sup>12</sup> David Morley, in his essay “Techno-orientalism” established this term, though Sharalyn Orbaugh expands upon it and brings historicizes it explicitly in Japan. She makes the claim that Japan, through its proliferation of advanced robotics, has become Othered in the eyes of the west as a kind of “Robot Kingdom,” and in the process, made into a sort of cultural Frankenstein.

“Modern Japan simply was cyberpunk,”<sup>13</sup> referring to a state of both technological advancement and “urban” grime. Sharalyn Orbaugh addresses this history of Japan’s techno-orientalism explicitly in her essay “The Genealogy of the Cyborg in Japanese Popular Culture.” This is all to say, that to write about Japan and science fiction is to enter into dialogue with a long and rich history of theory and criticism. My aim is to situate myself in this corpus and to open up a new line of argumentation within the field.

What many academics and critics at the intersection of posthumanism, science fiction studies, and Japanese studies tend to miss, however, is the existence of power-structures within Japanese science fiction and the connection to “real-life” examples of mastery in Japanese history and culture. This thesis will contextualize the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic in this way, exploring the contours of power and gender. The historian Amy Stanley, in her book *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan*, details the history of female bodies being subjugated by men in Edo era Japan.<sup>14</sup> In the article “Enlightenment Geisha: The Sex Trade, Education, and Feminine ideals in Early Meiji Japan,” she expands her scope to the Meiji Period, showing how conceptions of ideal womanhood contributed to the mastery of female bodies in Japan.<sup>15</sup> The traditional gender dynamic in Japan, of the male as head of household and the wife as subject, emerges from the early modern period and has tentacles which extend into the contemporary period. The history of Japan can be understood, under various circumstances, as the history of control over bodies, especially women’s’ bodies. Within posthumanism, when these relations of power do not

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<sup>13</sup> Gibson, William, “The Future Perfect.” Time.com.  
<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1956774,00.html>. Accessed 2/7/19.

<sup>14</sup> Amy Stanley, *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Amy Stanley, *Enlightenment Geisha: The Sex Trade, Education, and Feminine Ideals in Early Meiji Japan* (The Journal of Asian Studies, 2013).



disappear, a gendered Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic emerges. Simply put, this dynamic in science fiction anime is more often than not a gendered and hierarchical relationship, in which human men control nonhuman women bodies. By making a subclass of posthuman slave women the posthuman patriarchy is able to reinstate traditional gender roles and dynamics. Thereby, patriarchy maintains divisions between men and women, and consequently, human and nonhuman.

Here, I must make clear the kinds of women's' bodies which this thesis will concern itself with. However, rather than "women," it would be more appropriate to say: the female gynoids whose appearance is crafted through the lenses of male fantasies. Steven Brown quotes Oshii Mamoru, the director of the anime film *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, who says, "There are no human beings in *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*. The characters are all human-shaped dolls (*ningyō*)."<sup>16</sup> I would argue the same for the anime series featured in this thesis: there are no women, just women-shaped dolls (*onna no ningyō*). In any case, when I refer to women and their bodies, I am explicitly talking about cis-gendered women. This becomes more important to keep in mind when the topics of reproduction and "interiority" arise. To focus upon only one kind of woman and one kind of "women's experience" replicates the issues of bio-essentialism endemic to non-inclusive feminisms. However, within Japanese popular culture, representations of transgender people and people of various gender expressions are paltry. Therefore, I am left with the choice to limit myself to the kinds of bodies that anime chooses to represent.

In Chapter One of this thesis, I will introduce the anime *Ergo Proxy* as a principle example of the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic. The purpose of this chapter will be to establish a textual basis for the specific relations of power which arise in science fiction

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<sup>16</sup> Steven Brown, "Machinic Desires: Hans Bellmer's Dolls and the Technological Uncanny in *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*," *Mechademia 3*, University of Minnesota Press: 2008, 222.

anime. I will analyze the relationships between the human and posthuman characters, the relations between the robots themselves, and the larger power systems which operate on the characters. In this section, through an analysis of the “humans” and “androids” of *Ergo Proxy*, I will show how the text presents a posthumanism which initially seeks to reinforce the human as subject through the subjugation of mechanized beings. Humans create slaves out of non-humans in order to make themselves feel more human. Here I will employ Julia Kristeva’s theory of the Abject to describe this process of Othering non-humans. I will then explain how the text subverts this hierarchization of humans and androids. The series destabilizes what it means to be human in order to construct a more inclusive version of humanity and destroy the master-slave dynamic. This is counter to many of the conclusions I draw about the other works in this thesis. As such, *Ergo Proxy* serves to both establish the Dynamic, while creating a scenario in which the Dynamic is destroyed. This work serves to categorize and define the Dynamic, while at the same time, is an example of a posthuman work can deny it.

The work of Julia Kristeva serves as a useful framework to understanding the relationship between humans and non-humans. I will quote from her thinking throughout this thesis, and as such, will introduce her theory now. Kristeva, in her book, *The Power of Horror*, defines the abject as that which incites a breakdown of borders: between self and other, inside and outside, clean and dirty, etc. The abject may arrive in multiple forms, though common abjected things are vomit, defecation, trash, and-perhaps most importantly-corpse. She states that,

in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia University Press: 1982, 3.

The abject, for the person experiencing it, creates a moment of horror in which the things which they try to distance themselves from—their refuse and their dead—are brought to the forefront of consciousness. Anything which emerges from the body can be an abject thing: blood, excrement, etc. Trash is abject because it is refuse which brings one to an understanding of decay, as well as the deleterious effect humans have upon their world and environment. Kristeva also writes that abjection demarcates a space or object which would result in the breakdown of both meaning and society. In other words, the abject creates a separation between the human and the “threatening world of animals or animalism.”<sup>18</sup> The abject as a signal of transgressed boundaries, and the refusal of these tainted objects is what keeps both society and the human psyche together. The abject and the animal one could say, occupy the same space as the posthuman, in that both float in the slipstream between boundaries and binaries. While it would be negligent to conflate them completely, it is fruitful to consider posthumanism and the abject in concert with one another, as theories which are not oppositional but complementary. It is for this reason that Kristeva’s formulation of the abject is crucial for this thesis project, in that it adds a nuance to the human-machine interface.

In Chapter Two, I will introduce the anime *Gunslinger Girl* and *Mahoromatic*. This chapter will feature a dyadic dynamic: the mechanization of humans, and the humanization of machines. I shall make the case that these two separate—but related—processes serve only those with power, allowing the powerful to wield it over the gendered bodies of female cyborgs. In the first half I will show how the forced mechanization and indoctrination of young girls in *Gunslinger Girl* leads to the creation of a Master-Slave Dynamic between them and their human “Handlers.” I will then explore

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<sup>18</sup> Kristeva, *Horror*, 12-13.

this dynamic in depth, taking care to note the particular dramas of interpersonal relationships which take up the large majority of the narrative's action, as well as key visual details of the girls and their human masters. The weaponization of bodies for war echoes the fascistic aestheticization of violence, demonstrated most keenly through the work of the Italian Futurists.

The second half of this chapter will be a comparative analysis of the anime *Mahoromatic* with *Gunslinger Girl*. I will show how an android made for war becomes human, ostensibly disrupting the dynamic of humans as masters and robots as slaves. By asserting will--specifically, a will to live one's own life--the "robot" of *Mahoromatic* attempts to leave the dynamic of domination in order to become a willful agent. However, I will show how her limited lifespan, her position as a "maid," and the objectification of her body simply leads her into a new dynamic of power. She is enslaved not to a human but to the human systems of sexism, war, and late capitalism. In a similar vein, her body is used—regardless of her strivings towards freedom—as tool for masculine violence. Her humanity is denied in order to sustain the *cogito* model.

In Chapter Three, I will introduce the anime *Chobits*: the final text of this study. I will begin by positioning my analysis within an existing discourse surrounding this text. I will distinguish my analysis from this discourse as one which focuses on the posthuman selves of the figures present within the work, and the systems of gender and class which play upon the human and nonhuman characters. The figure of the female android here is most nakedly at the service of male desire—not for violence, but for male sexual pleasure. I will conduct an analysis of the physicality of these android characters, their emotional and physical relationships to "humans," and their emergent internal lives. Through this I will show how androids to resemble humans are positioned as abject slaves. Ultimately, (like in *Mahoromatic*) the android remains implicated within greater power structures which reject their personhood, even as they strive toward it. And as

they android women ingratiate themselves deeper within human society, I will show how human women enforce the *cogito* model as well, feeding into nested systems of patriarchy.

I will conclude this introduction section with the description of another museum exhibit: the “Modern Images of the Body in East Asia” exhibit from the Smith College Museum of Art in Northampton, Massachusetts. The exhibit, which ran from the Fall of 2017 to the end of the Summer of 2018, examined “the multifaceted representations of the body in East Asia from the nineteenth century to the present.”<sup>19</sup> The works in the exhibition featured highly aesthetic facsimiles of the body. The show engaged with both history and politics, and the ways in which governments, wars, and colonialism have impacted the ways bodies are seen, operate in the world, and are treated by both institutions and people.

One piece in particular was a pair of sculptures by Japanese sculptor Takano Miho. These objects were named *Robot Girl (Pink)* and *Robot Boy (Blue)* and were both created in 2006, curiously the year *Ergo Proxy* was released, and also the year that Robertson claims was when Japan had half of the world’s robots. The objects consist of two sculptures of clay and metal which resemble mechanical creatures. What I find fascinating about these works is their strange shapes, containing elements both angular and mechanical, as well as rounded, soft, almost flesh-like appendages. They appear to be uneasy fusions of biology and machinery and would perhaps be more easily understood as cyborgs or androids. The statues are explicitly gendered and are even color-coded with *Girl* colored pink and *Boy* colored blue. As shown in Figure 2, Robot Girl is tall and thin, whereas Robot Boy is short and squat, showing that idealized human

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<sup>19</sup> Miho, Takano. *Robot Girl (Pink) and Robot Boy (Blue)*, sculpture, Smith Museum, Northampton, MA. 体 Modern Images of The Body in East Asia.

bodies haunt even these abstract facsimiles of a humanoid figures. Even in the artistic imagination, gender cannot be decoupled from bodies. Even though they are clay productions of a mechanical, fantasy subjects they are gendered, and their gender is both prescribed and performed on the surface of their constructed bodies.



Figure 2: Robot Boy (right) and Robot Girl (left).

*Robot Girl* and *Robot Boy* show that social roles and delineations find their way into any human-made product. As such, hegemony, power, and domination spread far beyond the realm of the human. Even if we are in the future and are hurtled toward it, certain power-structures within society resist the temptation to expire. This thesis will argue that even in the futurist mode of social and technological optimism, a certain measure should be taken to understand that while the past is never past, the future is always uncomfortably close.

## CHAPTER 1

### ***ERGO PROXY AND HEGEMONIC HUMANITY***

#### **1.1 Introduction**

In order to see how The Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic plays out in Japanese anime it is important to first establish a textual justification. *Ergo Proxy* (2006), out of each of the anime series that will be discussed in this thesis, displays the most prominent power hierarchy between humans and posthuman beings. The androids represented in this anime blur the distinction between human and machine, and yet, are subject to the power of humans who place them outside of power, rejecting their hybrid identities. I will thus delineate the basic power dynamic between humans and posthumans, while historically contextualizing the work within early 2000s Japan. What makes *Ergo Proxy* such a rich text is how it first establishes, and then eventually unsettles the idea of humans as masters and machines as supine slaves. In this chapter, I will use *Ergo Proxy* to introduce the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic and how it functions both narratively and visually. This will prove useful in the following two chapters of this thesis. However, I will also show *Ergo Proxy* moves beyond this dynamic and reconceptualizes its own ideas of human-machine relations. As the chapters on *Gunslinger Girl*, *Mahoromatic*, and *Chobits* will show, *Ergo Proxy* achieves a level of self-reflection—and more importantly, pushes itself to action as a result—not seen in these other anime series.

*Ergo Proxy* is a science fiction anime series directed by Murase Shūkō and written by Satō Dai. It ran from February 25, 2006 to August 12<sup>th</sup> of the same year, during which 23 episodes were aired on Japanese television. It explores such themes as religion and consciousness, while at the same time depicting relations between humans and androids in a post-apocalyptic, cyberpunk world. The plot of *Ergo Proxy* is intensely

complex and convoluted, at times purposefully so; as such, it is very difficult to summarize. For simplicity's sake, I will give an annotated history of how the world of *Ergo Proxy* ended up in the state it is in. I will then discuss the plot of the anime itself.

In the distant past, careless resource harvesting on earth resulted in the near complete destruction of the earth's environment. To save what remained of humanity, two projects were undertaken by humanity: the "Boomerang Project" and the "Proxy Project." It is unclear what entity exacted these projects, though it is suggested that it was a pan-human endeavor from the surviving inhabitants of the dying earth. The former plan sent ships containing the remaining few humans into space, where they would orbit the earth until conditions permitted their return, if ever. The latter was an attempt to keep a human presence on the planet if humans found it impossible to ever return. Twelve domes were constructed on the planet's surface, each housing a large number of humans ruled by a "Proxy." These proxies were designed to be god-like beings of immense power. Some Proxies, as the series shows, are very simply physically powerful, while some have the ability to shift reality as they see fit. However, in order to make sure that their proxy-rulers would not retain power upon their return, Humans created Proxies using "amrita cells:" a special kind of cell which is destroyed upon contact with real sunlight. Each of these domes, along with their invisible Proxy, was made to contain both humans and androids, named Auto-Reivs by the series.

The events of the actual plot center around characters from the "Romdo" Dome. The core group of characters is as follows: Vincent Law, an "immigrant" from a destroyed Dome who eventually learns that he is a Proxy—or more accurately, a perfect clone of the Proxy on Romdo—who has lost his memory; Re-L, a human police investigator from Romdo who learns of the secret existence of the Proxies, and who the audience learns is also a clone of a Proxy; and Pino, a "Companion" type android infected with a sentience-granting virus called the "Cogito Virus." The group travels from



Romdo to the outside world to try and unlock Vincent's lost memories. Their larger journey, however, is to find answers to certain key questions which haunt their broken world: what is the Cogito Virus? What are Proxies? What is one's place in the world after the end of everything?

In the final episode of the series, the Boomerang Project ends and humans return to earth. This was presaged throughout the show as the "Pulse of the Awakening:" a feeling the Proxies across earth felt which signaled the healing of the earth and the return of humanity. Eventually, The Cogito Virus goes rampant in Romdo, resulting in the death of many humans and androids, as well as the destruction of the Dome. The anime ends with Re-L, Vincent, Pino, and other scattered survivors escaping Romdo as the clouds over earth part, revealing sunlight and the return of humanity.

In this chapter I will argue that *Ergo Proxy* shows posthuman society as explicitly dehumanizing, bringing humans closer to the realm of the machine than the human. This is not, however, shown as a positive breaking down of boundaries, but rather, a watering-down and lessening of the human-subject. It is a process of becoming "inhuman," not "posthuman." In order to regain some semblance of control over their world, and become less inhuman, humans in Dome place themselves in positions of power over android slaves. Through the creation of an underclass of non-humans, people within posthuman society feel superior, with a classically humanist sense of conquering their world and environment. The Posthuman Master Slave Dynamic is thus a means to regain a lost sense of power and humanity, through recreating the conditions of mastery and servitude. This happens, in the case of *Ergo Proxy*, following the destruction of the Anthropocene and re-creation of society in isolated Domes scattered across earth.

One could also make the argument that the death of the earth and the creation of Domed society mirrors the rise and fall of Japan's postwar economic prosperity. By

creating a slave class of posthumans, human society attempts to reinstate the power of humans. In doing so, *Domed Humans* attempts to undo the loss of control and agency felt by Japanese citizens during the “post-post-war economic” decline and ensuing precarity. However, I conclude that *Ergo Proxy* subverts this idea of mastery. The form of “hegemonic humanity” which *Domed Humans* wield as their identity is shown as ultimately unsustainable. The idea of being human then becomes fluid and mutable. In the wake of changing social and economic conditions, decentralized identities emerge and the Master Slave Dynamic dissolves. At this point Non-Hegemonic human identities flourish and a truer posthumanism becomes the dominant mode of human subjectivity.

## 1.2 “Humans”

The “humans” of *Ergo Proxy* problematize this very classification. Within posthumanism the Cartesian model of subjectivity is meant to break down in order for new identities to emerge; in *Ergo Proxy*, however, humans operate under the assumption that this model is still in place and that they are classically human. And yet, various aspects of the work point to this not being the case. In this section I will examine the representation of human-beings and their government in *Ergo Proxy* so that one may begin to understand this.

The Dome Society functions in almost a caste-system, in which groups of people are delineated into distinct social categorizations. A historical precedent for social hierarchization in Japan would be the *Shi-nō-kō-shō* system of social organization in Edo Period Japan, where samurai were ranked highest in society, followed by farmers, artisans, and finally merchants.<sup>20</sup> The castes of Romdo have specific roles to play in

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<sup>20</sup> There were groups of people outside of this arrangement as well, those being the Emperor himself, artists and actors, and *burakumin*: an “untouchables”-like class who worked with corpses and performed other “defiled” and abject jobs in Tokugawa society.

society and are treated by other people according to their status. As I will show here, the end of the world does not mean the end of society and social hierarchies. In fact, *Ergo Proxy* shows that a certain degree of social reorganization occurs almost naturally following the near-complete death of the earth.

At the top of the social hierarchy are “Fellow Citizens.” These are people born in the dome; in the case of Romdo, this group refers to native-citizens of Romdo. These people can perform the widest range of tasks, including being doctors, police officers, and administrators. Most of the named characters from Romdo fall into this category. Beneath “Fellow Citizens” are Immigrants. As the name suggests, these are people who have migrated from another dome in order to settle in Romdo. A large portion of these people originated in the faraway Dome of Mosk, where a Proxy named Monad is from. A central goal of the Immigrant group is to become Fellow Citizens, a process I will describe in detail later. Finally, there are what I will call “Ex-Domed” humans. These are people who, for crimes against Romdo, have been exiled from society and live just outside the dome, subsisting on trash ejected from Romdo. These are all of the strata of earth-residing humans, and yet, there is another type of human being: those who live on the ships which, until the very end of the series, orbit earth. The audience is never shown these humans, but they are presumed to still be alive as their ships descend from the clouds in the final episode. Each of these strata of humans is essential to the organization of Romdo society, which is highly regulated. As I will argue later in this chapter, a stratified society is crucial to the development of power hierarchies, which organizes the world to those in power in a meaningful way.

The citizens of Romdo are governed by an unseen cabal of rulers, known as The Collective. This group is comprised of four Auto-Reivs (named Derrida, Berkeley, Lacan,

and Husserl),<sup>21</sup> and the Regent, who is an old man (and Re-l's "grandfather") connected to life support systems. These beings operate beyond the public eye, and the only people who know of their existence are those in high-level administrative positions. Above the Collective is the Proxy, whose existence is known to only the Collective. In a sense, the Regent (literally a term for a Proxy ruler) and the Collective are proxy governors to the actual Proxy, who is meant to act on behalf of absent human rulers. As a result, there is no one, true entity to which power can be ascribed. People are ruled by the Collective, who is ruled by the Proxy, who is subject to the whims of the "ship-humans:" as such, it undermines the total control of any one subject. However, in the Cartesian idea of humanity, humans control their world through clear boundaries and clear lines of hierarchy. In Romdo's system, there is no clear source of power, and no clear distinction between those who have power and those without it. Later in this chapter, I will further explore this point, but for now it is important simply to understand that power operates in this stratified, albeit ambiguous state.



Figure 3: The Regent, connected to wires and face obscured by technology.

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<sup>21</sup> An attempt to unpack the reasoning behind these names and the influence these thinkers have had upon the show would certainly be interesting, and yet, is beyond the capacity of this chapter and thesis project.

An important role of The Collective is to determine the human birth rate, as humans are unable to reproduce biologically. Due to an accident in the beginning of the Proxy Project, humanity was rendered infertile.<sup>22</sup> If citizens begin to die in large quantities, or prematurely, the Collective can undergo a process of artificial reproduction to “increase production.”<sup>23</sup> This is done with an Artificial Womb, located in a secret location within Romdo. Every dome on earth has an Artificial Womb, otherwise known as a WombSys. The device is visually rendered as a room containing several Auto-Reivs with enlarged pelvises. As I will argue later in this chapter, this device expresses a sense of the abject along with a fear of origins. What is more urgent now, however, is the larger concept of artificial reproduction, which I will now discuss.

This notion of artificial reproduction is not an isolated idea within Japanese speculative fiction. The short story *Murder in Balloon Town* by Matsuo Yumi deals with this concept explicitly. The scholar Amanda Seaman, in regards to the story (which she also translated), writes that “in the latter part of the twentieth century, natural childbirth has disappeared in favor of a system in which a baby is gestated in a controlled environment outside of the mother (known as AU, or artificial uterus).” (Seaman 124) Set in a near-future Tokyo which has been aggressively re-organized into districts, the Special Seventh Ward, or “Balloon Town” has been created as a space for women to give natural birth. Balloon Town functions as a “female space” in which women may ostensibly lay claim to their bodies by rejecting technologically mediated birth.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ergo Proxy*, “Re-1124c41+.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, April 15, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> *Ergo Proxy*, “Awakening.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, February 25, 2006.

However, this utopian vision, as Seaman points out, in reality functions as a way to “control women,” (Seaman 130) with the demarcation of space in this way to make “Balloon Town a place of production” as well as turn women into “the ultimate form of the productive body.” (Seaman 133) They are situated within the dystopia of late capitalism in which their bodies, albeit now “naturally,” produce for the patriarchal order. (Seaman 135) The government’s insistence on regulating space around gestating women also regulates bodies, and women’s “sexuality and fertility” fall under the aegis of governmental power. In essence, *Balloon Town* foregrounds the issue of artificial reproduction as a way to show the means by which bodies, specifically women’s bodies, are controlled by power, and how they are made less human and more mechanical in the process. Again, this is done to their detriment, without the positive connotations of posthuman transcendence.

*In Ergo Proxy*, artificial reproduction plays a similar, yet slightly different role. Natural birth is not an option for anyone, and artificial reproduction is necessity for the continuation of human society. Human are not born but “produced.” In the process, human beings are made into produced goods. The Collective points out that Fellow Citizens are “all modeled after pre-arranged information.”<sup>24</sup> Notions of “individuality” or “individualism” cannot exist, for in this system, all the inhabitants are virtually clones of people who have already existed. Therefore, more important even than the fact that the citizens of Romdo are artificially produced is the fact that there is very little biological diversity, both between people and between generations. People are created with a blueprint in the attempt to mass-produce populations, and by proxy, artificially engineer a peaceful, prosperous society. Additionally, families and blood-ties lose their meaning in this system as well. There are familial relationships portrayed in the series, such as Re-L

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<sup>24</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. “Mazecity.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Asayama Yusuke and Satō Dai. WOWOW, March 11, 2006.

and her “grandfather,” but these kinds of “families” are always assembled and approved by the Collective. Children are luxury items; although it is not said explicitly, there is evidence that having a child is a privilege only the upper echelons of society are granted.<sup>25</sup> Children, like adults, are also compiled from a pool of genetic information; this is to say, they are not the biological children of their parents. And yet, they are as genetically related to their parents as they are to *all* of Romdo, seeing as all Citizens are derived from the same pool of genetic information. There can be only approved productions of the Artificial Womb, as Romdo society is meticulously planned all the way down.

This social organization extends beyond birth and into the existential reasoning underpinning people’s lives. Humans are “born to be fellow citizens”<sup>26</sup> with a specific purpose. Every individual within the Dome is produced to fulfill a specific role, be it as a member of the police force or a physician working for the government. The phrase *raison d’être* (translatable as “reason to be”) is employed by the Collective, and various Fellow Citizens, throughout the series. This phrase has an existentialist connotation; however, instead of one’s *raison d’être* being the result of experience and living, it is programmed. Existential necessity is manufactured and programmed into the human product. Everyone in the Dome is meant to have one, and if they lose it, the validity of their existence is effectively made null.

An example of this can be seen in Episode 7, when Vince and Pino contact a military “dome” located in the wastes of Earth. This episode shows that the citizens of this human tribe are bred for war and nothing else. Their *raison d’être* is violence. They

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<sup>25</sup> Raul Creed, who is the head of Romdo’s police force, and his wife are given a child by the Collective, but only after an arduous application process.

<sup>26</sup> *Ergo Proxy*, “Re-1124c41+.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, April 15, 2006.

refer to the process of using their Artificial Womb in a similar way as The Collective—as “increasing production”—and for the purpose of creating new soldiers. It becomes interesting then to consider the fact that the womb, which is in *Ergo Proxy* both feminine and mechanical, give birth to not people, but fuel for war. This is a topic I will explore in more detail in the following chapter, regarding the anime *Gunslinger Girl* and *Mahoromatic*. However, considering the notion that in war, the position of men is to perpetuate it and the position of women—in this case, girls—is to repopulate and maintain the structure of home and security, then it makes sense that the Artificial Womb functions in this way.

Through the conditions of artificial reproduction and the implantation of *raison d’être*, Domed Humans begin to not resemble actual humans at all. However, this process alone is not necessarily dehumanizing. Rather, it would be more appropriate to say that the mechanisms of artificial reproduction cause human birth to more closely resemble the production of machines. Humans, in this case, begin to mirror the androids which they live alongside, and the boundary between the two become blurry. As a result, we could understand Romdo society to be explicitly posthuman in its foregrounding of this collapse of distinctions. And yet, the citizens of Romdo do not conceptualize their society as posthuman; rather, they think of themselves as classically human in the Cartesian sense.

Steven Brown, in his essay on the anime film *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, makes the argument that in capitalist-posthuman society, people are “subject to the mechanisms of commodification” and “human beings start to resemble automata.”<sup>27</sup> In a sense, changing relationships to bodies and birth, as well as expanding notions of what is and is not human blurs the human-automata split. Presently, Japan is one of the most

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<sup>27</sup> Steven T. Brown, “Machinic Desires: Hans Bellmer’s Dolls and the Technological Uncanny in *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*,” *Limits of the Human* (2008): 229.



commodified nations of the developed world; and yet, as Anne Allison has pointed out, a sense of the human and of human relationships is failing, leading to the creation of a “*muen shakai*”<sup>28</sup> or “relation-less society.” Therefore, one could argue that the confluence of advanced commodification and artificial reproduction in *Innocence* leads to the dehumanization of people. A transformation of this variety is undergone in *Ergo Proxy*. In *Innocence*, the setting is an immense cityscape in which the “ubiquity of signs and unavoidability of mass media” creates a sense of artifice and claustrophobia. Giant neon billboards dot the landscape, advertising products and businesses, screaming their messages into the cacophony of the city. In the dome, electronic billboards and announcements urge citizens to “Make Waste,” that “Life is easier when you lighten your load.”<sup>29</sup> There is a constant din of advertising and commercial coercing. This media and commercial saturated environment heightens the feeling of dysphoria and of being lost in the mechanisms of something which seeks to elide difference in people. This aspect of the city of Romdo could be thought of as dehumanizing, in a way which mirrors *Innocence*. This is to say, the sense of the self—in a Cartesian sense—becomes lost, or at the very least, muddy.

To exist and to be a human is to consume: in effect, like the conditions of neo-liberalism, all aspects of life become subsumed into the market (although in the case of *Ergo Proxy*, since it is a post-apocalyptic setting, the market is really a simulacrum of an economic system, functioning on models long dead.) I will return to this point later in this chapter, in my discussion of the “real-world” social and economic conditions of Japan around the time of *Ergo Proxy*’s production. In this environment, combined with the idea that people do not reproduce organically (and are derived from pre-programmed

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<sup>28</sup> Allison, *Prekarious*, 8

<sup>29</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. “Awakening.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, February 25, 2006.

information, lacking in genetic diversity), people move closer to the androids that they control. In this case, if not reproduction and self-produced reasons for existing, the question is brought to mind: what makes one human at all? Having emotions could be one answer, for within the humanist constellation emotion and affect help define one's relationship to other people and the world. However, in Romdo, this is not the case.

I am now led to another aspect of Romdo society which feeds into an environment of dehumanization: the regulation of emotional affect. Combined with the conditions of artificial birth through the Wombsys—which brings people closer to that of machines—the people of Domed Society become less stable in their human identities. Sharalyn Orbaugh, in her essay “Emotional Infectivity: Cyborg Affect and the Limits of the Human” which also makes use of *Innocence*, makes the argument that “affect” is an important marker of humanity. She outlines the concept of “selfhood” as being something “predicated on a carefully maintained distinction between the outside (of a person) and the inside.” (Orbaugh 152) Humans feel emotion within their bodies and have a sense of interiority. This emotion is expressed through the somatosensory organs—ears, eyes, skin—creating a sense of exteriority. “Affect,” as she defines it, is the communication of one's interiority with one's exteriority, and the ability to read these emotions in humans and have them be read in oneself. Selfhood is constructed from the mechanisms of affect. As she explains, this notion of interiority and exteriority, however, becomes complicated in the posthuman sphere; in other words, “memory and the body [become] untrustworthy as foundations of selfhood.” (Orbaugh 161) When the organic body no longer becomes the default vessel of human subjectivity, how then can one experience affect? How can one be human at all? Orbaugh claims that two characters in *Innocence*, Kusanagi and Ougi, are posthuman, yet still “human” through the affect they feel, yet do not so clearly express.

Through the ability to think—but more importantly—to feel, posthuman beings retain an element of humanity, while at the same time forging their own unique subject positions. Love and other emotions may still exist even when the physical body does not.” (Orbaugh 151) Affect then becomes something not biologically derived, but intrinsically tied to the idea of being “human.” This entangles the idea of humanity preceding affect, suggesting the inverse. What makes one human is their ability to feel. In a posthuman framework, being “human” in this sense should refer to having subjectivity—being a person in the world, regardless of technologically mediated one’s body is.

Affect can also be transmitted interpersonally, in a phenomenon that Orbaugh, through the work of Teresa Brennan, names the “Transmission of Affect.” (Orbaugh 164) Through social interaction, people’s emotions and traces of feelings travel through space, infecting others with affect. Neurological changes emerge from seeing and reading emotion. Affect is something both physical and nonphysical, making the case that posthumans who exist outside of the biological/mechanical dichotomy are still “human.” However, *Ergo Proxy* seeks to challenge this notion of human affect acting as the defining factor of one’s humanity. As I will show, affect is seen as “inhuman” and detrimental to the social order. Moreover, for Auto-Reivs, affect is seen as both foreign and destructive.

In Romdo society affect is thoroughly flattened. Humans have their heart rates and vitals constantly monitored by their Entourage-type Auto-Reivs. Any time they experience a spike of emotion, they are prompted to calm down. When Re-I is badly injured following an attack by an unknown Proxy, she grows frustrated and her mood elevates, prompting doctors to label her as “hysterical.” This recalls the history of hysteria and women, which Michel Foucault discusses in *The History of Sexuality*. Women’s emotions, historically, have been used as a warrant for the control of women’s’

bodies and the Othering of women's experience. This is to say, power (wielded by patriarchy) justifies subjugating women by labeling dissent as Hysteria. In Romdo, to have emotions is to be subject to power, and Re-L's experience of this is both potent and highly gendered.

In addition, a character Raul Creed, who functions as a kind of chief of police, refers to the fact that his emotions are being "controlled"<sup>30</sup> when asked about his erratic behavior. Being able to control one's emotions is important to being both a Fellow Citizen and a functioning human, and the two are routinely conflated. Immigrants, who work to become full citizens of Romdo, are told to both "work on their human relationships"<sup>31</sup> (*ningen kankei*) and to "achieve full control of their emotions."<sup>32</sup> Affect thus becomes a non-human, more robotic trait, though according to Orbaugh, it is ironically the only thing that makes people meaningfully human. To flatten affect is to, perhaps, treat societal disorder, but it is to also erase a key marker of subjectivity. The citizens of Romdo live in a society where a Ballardian "death of affect" has led to, again, the blurring of the line between human and inhuman. To be a Fellow Citizen is to be inhuman. These "not-humans" are given a name later in the series by the character Daedalus: Pseudohuman, or "false human." They are flawed reproductions of real humans, who look and sound like real people, but are in reality human simulacrum. Being posthuman is not liberating; it reduced the value of life and corrupts the Cartesian pure human subject.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. "Domecoming." Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Kuwabe Yuko. WOWOW, April 1, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. "Awakening." Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, February 25, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. "Confession." Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Asayama Yusuke and Satō Dai. WOWOW, March 4, 2006.

The Pseudohumans attempt to assert their claim to humanity, however, through various methods. The most prominent one is to establish clear boundaries between self and “other.” As mentioned earlier, Immigrants are not treated as full humans. They are made to wear distinctive red clothing and are given menial, often dangerous jobs. Vincent Law, for instance, is tasked with hunting down rogue Auto-Reivs, which results in him getting injured on a regular basis. This is acceptable to him and the governing body, however, because they tell him it is furthering his path towards citizenship; to the Collective, his death would not be costly in any way. Immigrants are also socially derided. While getting her Auto-Reiv housemaid analyzed by Vincent, a Pseudohuman woman uses harsh language, calling him a “filthy Immigrant.” When Vincent reproaches her, she exclaims, “How could an Immigrant not listen to what I say?”<sup>33</sup> as if Vincent were a malfunctioning automaton. Immigrants are pushed to the margins of society and are incentivized to rejoin the center. However, the anime never actually shows this process happening. There is never an instance of a former-Immigrant becoming a fellow citizen. This is a perpetually moving goalpost. This then begs the question: what is the function of Immigrants within Romdo, which appears to be such a meticulously planned society? To answer this, I must also elaborate upon the class of ex-Domed humans, for they are also othered in Romdo society, albeit in a different way.

As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, in Episode 4 it is learned that there is a tribe of humans living outside of Romdo who live on refuse and wish to return to their home. The character Hoody functions as a kind of leader to the ex-Domed. His flock desire to return to Romdo, and he promises them that he is working on a way to get them all home. This never ends up happening, for when Romdo authorities send for Re-L, who ventured outside the Dome after chasing Vincent Law (who himself had ran away

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<sup>33</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. “Awakening.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, February 25, 2006.

from Romdo), the ex-Domed are summarily killed. Hoody manages to smuggle himself into Romdo to only be killed by drones. Their humanity is not considered to be important by the power structures of Romdo, like the Immigrant class. A useful way to understand this is through the concept of abjection, which I introduced in the introduction of this thesis.

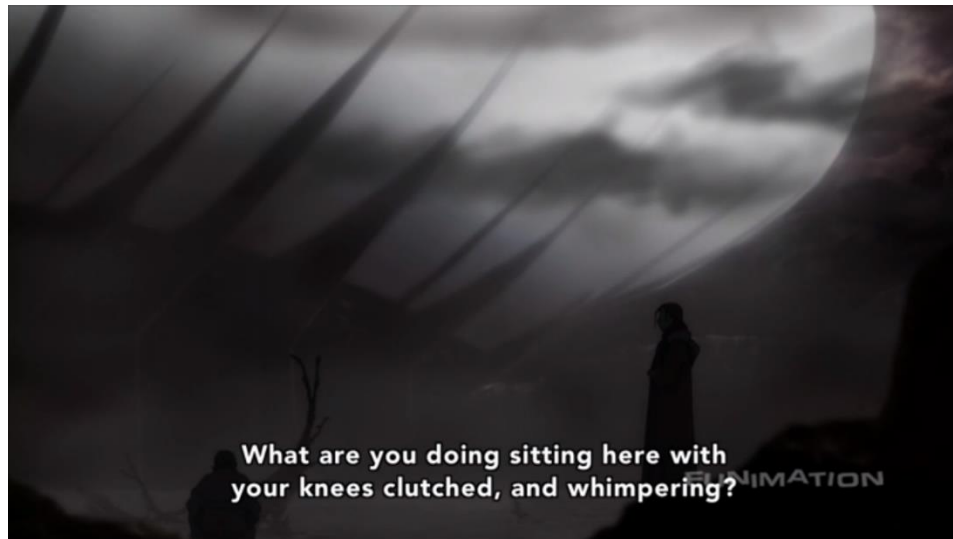


Figure 4: A view from outside of Romdo.

The class of exiled humans, along with the trash dumped outside of Romdo, represent an abject other which needs to be destroyed and placed “at a distance” in order for Pseudohumans to create a sense of self. They live with the trash, outside of the sterile egg that is Romdo (Figure 4), coding them as dirty and abject. Immigrants are also coded as abject, for they are placed outside of normal society, through their means of dress and their handling of dangerous jobs. They are an untouchable-like class which handles the deeds that the Pseudohumans need but cannot bear to do themselves.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In Japan, a class of this sort exists: the *burakumin*, which is a socially castigated group of people who have historically worked in taboo industries: embalmers, tanners, etc.

This is an interesting shift that occurs, because Kristeva's assertion is that the abject lives in the breakdown between self and other; in *Ergo Proxy* it is the fabrication of the abject which allows for the creation and maintaining of these borders. Therefore, the abject beings of Immigrants and Ex-Domed Humans are crucial to society. The establishing of groups of people who are apart from society, yet are essential to its running, creates a social pressure valve, allowing humans in the center to feel more "human."

Androids in *Ergo Proxy* are similarly abjected. They perform the work that humans do not want to do and are Othered so that there can be a distinction between self and things outside of the self. Like Immigrants and ex-Domed Humans, androids are "thrust aside" to maintain a distinction between self and other, human and machine. In this next section, I will thoroughly explore the representation of non-human beings in *Ergo Proxy*. I will go into not only what they are, but what they do, and how their very existence is a process of othering to create a hegemonic ideation of the human subject.

### **1.3 "Androids"**

The figure of the android in *Ergo Proxy* is used by humans as symbolic tool—almost a strawman—by which to reinforce their own humanity. This is much in the same way as Immigrants are used by Fellow Citizens. A process such as this is accomplished in several different ways. To start, one can simply examine the term "Auto-Reiv" itself. Although it is never explicitly stated in the series, I argue that this word is a portmanteau of "automated" and "slave." In spite of the fact that Auto-Reivs display a sort of simulated intelligence and have personalities of their own, they inhabit an underclass within Romdo society. They are an automated slave labor force whose lack of autonomy, ironically, allows Romdo to exist harmoniously.

Romdo itself could also be thought of as a portmanteau: “Rome” and “Dome.” Considering this, that Romdo society is in some way modeled after Roman society—or at least a medley of societies from antiquity—certain disclosures become clearer. Foremost among these is Romdo’s relationship with slavery. If Rome is seen as the model upon which Romdo is based, then it serves to reason they would import a culture of forced labor as well. Interestingly enough, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche writes about this slave-culture within Greek society. Nietzsche, in his essay “The Greek State,”<sup>35</sup> makes the claim that all slave-bearing civilizations, especially ancient Greece, became great through their use of slave labor. He writes that “Culture, which is chiefly a real need for art, rests upon a terrible basis...”

in order that there may be a broad, deep, and fruitful soil for the development of art, the enormous majority must, in the service of a minority be *slavishly* subjected to life’s struggle, to a greater degree than their own wants necessitate. At their cost, through the surplus of their labor, *that privileged class* is to be relieved from the struggle for existence, in order to create and to satisfy a new world of want.<sup>36</sup>

Since slaves were made to perform everyday labor-intensive tasks, the upper echelons of society were permitted more time to create works of art and literature. Culture is the product of “shameful” labor, or perhaps more appropriately, because there is a group of people performing labor, culture can be freely produced by those who do not have to labor. In his formulation of Master and Slave, Nietzsche references Rome and Greece as the greatest examples of socially bifurcated civilizations. I argue then that the citizens of Romdo attempt to simulate this kind of civilization. They are the new Rome: the final Domed bastion of humanity in a dead world. And they are great—and human—because

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<sup>36</sup>. Nietzsche, F. ‘The Greek State’. In K. Ansell-Pearson & C. Diethe, *Nietzsche: 'On the Genealogy of Morality' and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press: 2006, 166.



they utilize slavery in the form of Auto-Reivs. This dichotomic relationship of power is coded into the substructure of Romdo society. However, I argue that android slavery is not carried out for the same reasons as Nietzsche has outlined. Instead of allowing culture to be created, Automated Slaves make Pseudohumans feel as though they are human. The Pseudohumans thus attempt to enter a human lineage by repeating a “great” human society, though not for ‘cultural cultivation’ but rather to keep up appearances. Slaves are employed to obscure the idea that Romdo is merely a distorted echo of the human world.

By this reasoning, there is no mistaking the power hierarchy of (pseudo) human and machine: it is both clear and ubiquitous. Entourage Auto-Reivs are assigned to every Citizen and Immigrant of the dome to be utilized how they see fit. Humans even have some authority over their Entourage’s cognitive functions. In the episode “Awakening,” finding her Entourage Iggy frustrating, Re-I turns off his “Turing Language Program”, turning him into a silent machine without personality or inflected speech patterns.<sup>37</sup> Auto-Reivs exist to be used and controlled by humans, even in their ability to speak; in the following chapters I will elaborate more upon this relationship between language and power, specifically as they intersect with gender.

The Master-Slave dynamic, however, is subverted in certain key areas. As I stated earlier in this chapter, power operates in specific ways. The Auto-Reivs Iggy and Kristeva (who is the Entourage of the character Raul Creed) are explained as having the visual information their eyes pick up as constantly monitored by the Reagent—the cyborg leader of Romdo—and the Collective. This attribute extends to all Auto-Reivs within Romdo. Through them, the governing body’s power is maintained, and their citizens are observed. Auto-Reivs serve as a kind of collective Panopticon which

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<sup>37</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. “Awakening.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, February 25, 2006.

monitors Romdo, allowing the surveillance state of Romdo to intercede when necessary. This helps them preserve the fragile societal equilibrium. The Collective, to restate the point, is a fundamentally posthuman body; four Auto-Reivs and a cyborg control Romdo society in the place of their invisible Proxy ruler. Considering the word “Entourage” comes from the French *entourer* (to surround), one can see that the Auto-Reivs, while controlled and disempowered by their humans, actually serve as tools of power over human beings. They surround humans and imbed them into an invisible power structure. They are all ruled by Auto-Reivs and the Reagent. The top level of society is not run by humans, but rather by those who simply wish to maintain the illusion that humans have power. In short, Auto-Reivs are the slaves who hold humanity in bondage. As such, power within Romdo does not in the end reinforce the Cartesian human subject as the sole, organizing principle in society; instead, power, in its various permutations and contortions, actually serves to devalue this human subject. The human as it is understood in this model is disempowered, making their superiority over—and by extension, distinction from—Auto-Reivs tenuous.

The presence of the Cogito Virus serves to further collapse the distance between Pseudohumans and Auto-Reivs. As I have mentioned earlier, the virus gives infected androids self-awareness and the ability to think outside of pre-set programming. The virus is described as creating a “soul”<sup>38</sup> for the Auto-Reivs. In other words, the virus makes them seem more human, untethering them from complete domination, or in the Nietzschean sense, their “Slave Morality.” Near the end of the series, when Romdo has been left ruined by the Cogito Virus running rampant, infecting every Auto-Reiv, it is revealed that the Cogito Virus is in fact a secret contingency plan for humanity, like the

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<sup>38</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. “Shining Sign.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Asayama Yusuke and Satō Dai. WOWO, April 22, 2006.

Proxy and Boomerang Projects.<sup>39</sup> Cogito was always meant to infect Auto-Reivs. It was designed so that infected Auto-Reivs would, by the will of original humanity, act as the vessel for human souls. The project of humanity was meant to be taken up by androids if biological humans could never return to earth.

To speak of the virus itself, how it affects Auto-Reivs specifically is highly revealing. When Iggy is infected in Episode 13, he is shown as becoming highly emotional and acting erratically. The Companion-type Auto-Reiv, Pino, is also described as being infected with Cogito, and expresses obvious feelings, and emotes naturally, though these emotions are refined through being around humans. She learns what “sad” is by observing this emotion from the ex-Domed humans she and Vincent meet upon their exit from Romdo. The Cogito Virus, I contend, is not merely the transmission of consciousness to one Auto-Reiv to another, but also the transmission of affect. The Auto-Reivs are granted the ability to express emotion, which, as has been argued earlier in this paper, is what makes humans truly “human.”

Entourage-type Auto-Reivs are constructed to appear humanoid but also obviously in-human at the same time. They have no facial features beyond eyes which glow with mechanical light. Their bodies are pure machine; they move as people but are clearly not. Without these features, they are unable to project affect through non-verbal signs. This effect is compounded by their programming, which prohibits them from expressing emotion. The Cogito Virus, then, implants the ability to feel. It allows Auto-Reivs to generate affect, and this affect is transferred from android to android, much like emotions are shared from person to person. This “socially induced affect”<sup>40</sup> is what

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<sup>39</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. “Proxy/Deus ex Machina.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, August 12, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Cornell University Press, 2014.

makes Auto-Reivs the vessels of a “soul.” Through affect, they become more human-like.

The fact that this transmission of affect is positioned as a virus in *Ergo Proxy* points to the existential challenge sentient automatons pose to the Pseudohumans. Instead of being something naturally occurring, and biological, it is positioned as aberrant and mechanical. This is to say, the Cogito Virus is a computer bug, not a physical ailment. It is a glitch in their programming, even though this is later proven to not be the case. The virus is something sickening and undesirable, and I contend, evokes a quality of abjection. Cogito is abject, and as such, must be rooted out and destroyed—placed “at a distant.” The Collective employs Immigrants to destroy the abject, even though they themselves exist within this zone of Othering. The abject hunts the abject. As we have discovered, this process of Othering is employed by the Pseudohumans of Romdo as a measure by which to assert their sense of self and human identity. They are not Immigrants or androids; therefore, they are human. They cleanse the abject from their midst in order to reclaim the “purity” of the subject.

And yet, the truth of humanity’s “baselessness” only serves to dehumanize pseudohumans. Due to the fact that the citizens of Romdo are so concerned with asserting their humanity through creating an Other to distance themselves from, their conception of humanity takes on the quality of artifice. It is this artificial nature that serves to dismantle the entire existential framework upon which their post-apocalyptic haven has been built. Humans are created and designed like designer goods. They are trained to live without affect through controlling their emotions and are monitored by the very machines they seek to establish as Other and abject. Humans are like machines, and machines become more like “humans.” Carl Silvio writes of this anxiety, that “what

makes machines machine and humans human are the same thing.”<sup>41</sup> Even though Pseudohumans employ various tactics to seem more human, certain fundamental features of their society make this largely futile.

Pino’s “mother” is shown turning her “Turing Language Program” off effectively stifling her personality. This is similar to how Iggy’s personality is shut off by Re-I.<sup>42</sup> This controlling of affect, so that it does not blur the distinction between the machines *with* it and humans *without* it, is simply another existential defense mechanism employed by the Pseudohumans. When this fails, it becomes clear why they are pseudo-humans. They are not merely imperfect humans; they are not human at all. They are “false” humans, simulacra within an even greater social simulacrum.

This horror at the artifice of humanity is expressed by Re-I when she enters the room containing the WombSys. When she sees it, seemingly for the first time in her life, she appears distressed. She is struck speechless at the sight. The character Daedalus, a doctor/researcher in Romdo who designed Re-L, arrives in the room and explains what she is seeing. Re-I remarks that “I knew that people were controlled by the same production lines as Auto-Reivs”<sup>43</sup> but the reality of that had never set in. Re-I is in this moment voicing the horror that the substructure of Romdo society attempts to hide: that the categorical difference between humans and machines is an illusion. This moment expresses a fear of origins, specifically, the fear that one’s origins are inhuman. Humans and machines are virtually identical when seen at this vantage point, and the project of

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<sup>41</sup> Carl Silvio, “Animated Bodies and Cybernetic Selves: *The Animatrix* and the Question of Posthumanity” *Cinema Anime* (2006): 129.

<sup>42</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. “Awakening.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, February 25, 2006.

<sup>43</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. “Re-I 124C41+.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, July 28, 2007.

separating the two disintegrates. The Dynamic of mastery between pseudohumans and Auto-Reivs is simply another failed means to maintain the Cartesian subject.

#### 1.4 Hegemonic and Non-Hegemonic Humanities

At this point I am interested in identifying a trend of categorizing the human subject within *Ergo Proxy* that extends across Japanese science fiction. I will be employing a line of argumentation borrowed from Vivian Sobchack's *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*. Although Sobchack narrows her analysis to western science fiction, I find that it can be modified and deployed as a fruitful lens to understand human-ness within Japanese science fiction.

In the chapter titled "Postfuturism," Sobchack identifies two means of conceiving of the human within the opposing realms of "conservative" and "postmodern" American science fiction films. Changing social relations in the late capitalism of the 1980s caused a new mode of identification with the alien. Where in the '60s and '70s, the alien was horrific and literally "alien," more contemporary portrayals of the alien have caused society to "regard signs of its own alienation" as "positive." The other becomes "more human than human" and "the difference of the alien Other becomes absorbed in the homogeneity of a new universal 'humanism.'"<sup>44</sup> This is to say, in mainstream science fiction works, there is an impulse to absorb the Other, or the alien, into the self. In the process of doing so difference' and otherness are maintained so to "embrace the alien as an other who is like us."<sup>45</sup> Homogeneity is preserved even as the Other is incorporated into the self, because the Other *becomes* the self. As opposed to embracing hybridity and difference, these things elide in an effort to create a model,

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<sup>44</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 293.

<sup>45</sup> Sobchack, *Screening Space*, 294

original human subject, or as Sobchack claims, to perpetuate the “myth of universal and nonhierarchical homogeneity.”<sup>46</sup> This, of course, is fallacious, for the subsumed Other’s identity becomes placed beneath that of the model human identity; their previous mode of identification is at the bottom of the hierarchy. In order to universalize this concept, and to extend it beyond American science fiction, I will refer to this concept of absorbing the other into a hegemonic human model “Hegemonic Humanity.”

Sobchack, however, speaks also to the inverse of this, or as I will call it, “Non-Hegemonic Humanity.” In postmodern American science fiction, the alien Other is not absorbed into a larger conception of the human; it does not “embrace the alien” so much as it “erases alienation.” Aliens are not thought of as an Other to be conquered, but as subjects on their own, with an identity that does not need to be conquered and assimilated. In a way, it is a radically anti-imperialist mode of thinking about the Other. In this way of conceptualizing the human and the “alien” there is “no original model for being,”<sup>47</sup> human or otherwise. In this non-hegemonic mode, difference is not elided, but accepted as a core condition of postmodern existence, in which identities are diffused across multitudes of spaces and modes of mediation.

In this light, the idea of a Fellow Citizen becomes emblematic of Hegemonic Humanity. Within *Romdo*, the idea model of being is to become a Fellow Citizen, which is the same thing as becoming human. Outside of the boundary of Fellow Citizen, there are only lesser modes of being. However, *Ergo Proxy* tries to debase the validity of a hegemonic nature of being human. By showing humans to be inhuman, even so much as to say that the core of their social and political organization is inhuman (The

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<sup>46</sup> Sobchack, *Screening Space*, 297.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 297.

Collective of Auto-Reivs),<sup>48</sup> *Ergo Proxy* shows that while a mode of being human may have power, it can be subverted and rejected. When the Dome breaks open and the Cogito Virus infects all known Auto-Reivs, we can see this as the proliferation of a Non-Hegemonic Humanity. This kind rejects the totalizing, erasing Fellow Citizen model and embraces hybridity and difference. In other words, within a system of Non-Hegemonic Humanity, the Posthuman Master Slave Dynamic breaks down, for Hegemonic or Master Humanity dissolves into little humanities which cannot impose systemic oppression onto posthuman bodies.

### 1.5 Romdo and Japan's Bubble Economy

Thus far in this chapter I have laid out the structure of the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic within *Ergo Proxy*, showing how humans, feeling a sense of humanity diminish, create an underclass in order to make themselves feel more human. However, like any pop culture production, *Ergo Proxy* was produced within a specific socio-economic context. I argue that Romdo society in *Ergo Proxy* references the conditions of the bubble economy, with its destruction mirroring both the immediate aftershock and the resulting social conditions of the early 2000s.

As I laid out in the Introduction, Anne Allison argues that, as a result of widespread precarity in Japan, a sense of humanity is diminished. This languishing humanity points to a fundamental lack in Japanese society: the lack of control. During the bubble, there was the promise of a flourishing economy, and society inculcated this as a sense of conquest over post-war adversity. The bursting of the bubble was a form

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<sup>48</sup> In addition to this, Re-L's "grandfather," the Reagent, is visually represented as a very old man hooked up to numerous wires and life support systems. The Reagent never speaks, and rarely moves at all this way; as such, it is unclear to what degree he is alive at all. In this way he resembles a cyborg, and as such, debases fundamentally the idea of Romdo society being hegemonically human.



of social trauma; in order to process this, we can look at media works, such as *Ergo Proxy*, to see the fallout. The Romdo-dome (the “Rome Dome”) is shaped like a bubble. From the outside--from the vantage point of ex-Domed humans--it also appears to be an egg, teeming with life and potential energy. As I have also already mentioned, within this bubble is a media-saturated society in which consumption, or “making waste,” is privileged. This highly structured society is maintained through population control and social hierarchization, the most crucial being the division between humans and Auto-Reivs (automated slaves). I contend here that the thing maintaining human-control—and the bubble of Romdo—is the Posthuman Master Slave-Dynamic between humans and Auto-Reivs. The establishment of control, which was lost during the bursting of the bubble in 1990, and the fear of changing economic and social conditions, maintains society. Romdo mirrors the bubble economy, or rather, is a re-creation of the conditions of the bubble economy, maintained by mastery and domination. Its destruction then resembles the bursting of the bubble.

The Rome Dome, however, is destroyed. The bubble bursts due to the spreading of the cogito virus, and the surviving humans are forced to evacuate. Ironically, everyone becomes an Immigrant at this point, forced into a life of provisional existence and precarity. This, again, runs parallel to historical events: following the immediate bursting of economic bubble, an era of uncertainty rose in the early 2000s. However, what results in *Ergo Proxy* is more nuanced. Within Romdo, the social-model of citizenship and humanity was hegemonic, with Immigrants pining to enter and the ruling powers being the gatekeepers. Outside of the dome, this structure of humanity, like the bubble itself, is unsustainable. What results is the hope for an un-hegemonic humanity.

Another clear example of Hegemonic vs. Non-Hegemonic can be read in the epigram of the show itself, and how it relates to ending of the final episode. The epigram of the series, which fades in and out before the very first shot of animation, is a quote

from the Italian artist Michelangelo. The poem<sup>49</sup> is a reaction to another poem, written regarding Michelangelo's sculpture "Night" which he produced for the tomb of an Italian nobleman of the 16th century. The original poem reads:

*Night, which you see sleeping in such sweet attitudes  
Was carved in this stone by an Angel  
And because she sleeps, she has life.  
Wake her, if you don't believe it, and she will speak to you. (92)*<sup>50</sup>

Michelangelo<sup>51</sup> wrote this response, which serves as *Ergo Proxy's* epigram:

*My sleep is dear to me, and more dear this being of stone;  
As long as the agony and shame last.  
Not to see, not to hear [or feel] is for me the best fortune.;  
So do not wake me! Speak softly. (94)*<sup>52</sup>

Strozzi (the poet of the first poem), upon seeing the statue named "Night" is struck by its realistic qualities. Because of this he humanizes the sculpture. He assigns it a divine origin, bringing it closer to the realm of human. He even suggests that Night is alive, as how could something resembling a human so exactly not be alive? She is so realistic as to appear to be a sleeping human.

We could apply this logic to the Auto-Reivs of Romdo. The Auto-Reivs move and speaks. When they are infected with the Cogito Virus, they even gain the ability to express and transmit affect. Although their body is made of metal, it has a human shape,

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<sup>49</sup> The poem came from Giovanni Carlo di Strozzi.

<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Gross, *Dream of the Moving Statue*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, 92.

<sup>51</sup> I will be ignoring the political elements of Michelangelo's reply, pertaining to a critique of the governance of Cosimo I de' Medici, in favor of a more literary approach. This is not to say, however, that such an added layer is unwarranted, but simply that this line of interpretation exceeds the scope of this study.

<sup>52</sup> Gross, *Statue*, 94.

much like Night has an appearance of stone yet is modeled after the human body. This is an example of the desire to subsume beings into a Hegemonic ideation of humanity. Night is not just a statue; she is alien, yet beautiful. As such, the impulse would be to bring Night into a human framework. Auto-Reivs, however, are kept outside of Hegemonic Humanity for most of the series. At the end, when they all become host of Cogito, they enter it, only to have it result in the destruction of Rome society, which was the cornerstone of humanism's hegemony. This shows that Hegemonic Humanity, as a means of preserving some measure of Cartesian humanism, is unable to incorporate certain identities.

Michelangelo's reply, however, rejects this conception of the human. In saying her "sleep is dear" as is her "being stone," Michelangelo resists conceiving of her as being a conventual human. Like Strozzi, he claims that by the fact that she sleeps, she is alive. Yet her continued sleeping is what keeps her "innocent." She does not see, feel, or hear. She does not operate within the world. She expresses no affect and desires only to remain in sleep. She, through Michelangelo, begs the reader to allow her to rest, and not, in a Heideggerian sense, "throw"<sup>53</sup> her into the world. To be within the constellation of Hegemonic Human is to experience "agony and shame" and have difference erased for the purpose of preserving a single model of human experience.

In the final episode, when Romdo is crashing down, having been destroyed in the chaos, the Auto-Reiv Pino is seen walking down a ruined hallway filled with dead Auto-Reivs, seeking to exit Romdo. She is met by Kristeva, who leads her out of Romdo. Pino muses, after they are both safe, asking Kristeva: "Why I am different from the others?" meaning the other Auto-Reivs. Kristeva explains that she is not; her Cogito is simply her

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<sup>53</sup> I refer here to Martin Heidegger's idea of "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*), which describes the state humans find themselves in relation to the world. People are "thrown into the world" at birth and must assess their existence in a state of being thrown.

“following [her] own will.”<sup>54</sup> When Re-L is later seen running from the collapsing dome, she comes close to death, dangling from a broken ladder. But just as she accepts her death, she sees Pino and Kristeva save her, and the three of them journey to find Vincent.

These two final scenes serve to justify non-hegemony and hybridity over hegemony. Kristeva explains to Pino that her conscious is not aberrant, but rather an expression of her “fledgling self” granted by Cogito.<sup>55</sup> When Pino and Kristeva save Re-L, this is the redefinition of what it is to be human, or rather, what lies at the periphery of the human: the posthuman. These posthuman beings, rejected by the hegemony of the Dome, come together and help one another. They are thrust into an unknown world, but with a better sense of who they are what they mean to one another. They are human, with an idea of personhood, but one which did not fit within the destroyed Romdo. They show that to be human in a non-hegemonic sense is to not be drawn towards the center but to extend to the periphery. The trio move away from Romdo, inside of which Pseudohumans and Auto-Reivs were manufactured in order to replicate an idealized version of humanity according to the original humans. Romdo dies, while the Pseudohuman and the infected Auto-Reivs fly into the open world and carry on. This “becoming-human” exceeds hegemony and undoes it. The Master-Slave Dynamic comes undone when humanity loses its dichotomic structure, moving closer to a posthuman model of subjectivity.

## 1.6 Conclusion

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<sup>54</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. “Proxy/Deus ex Machina.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, August 12, 2006.

<sup>55</sup> *Ergo Proxy*. “Proxy/Deus ex Machina.” Directed by Murase Shūkō. Written by Satō Dai. WOWOW, August 12, 2006.

*Ergo Proxy* is an important work to examine in order to understand the basic structure of the Posthuman Master Slave Dynamic. Humans, through historical trauma, begin to feel inhuman, and this precipitates an internal lack. To make up for this imbalance and the discomfort of changing social and economic conditions, an underclass of posthuman beings is constructed. This establishes a power hierarchy. In *Ergo Proxy*, reading this through a specific work of Nietzsche, this power relationship between masters and slaves harkens to an imagined past and prototypical ideal to aspire to, creating a historical link to a “golden-age” of humanity. This can happen because Domed society is strictly a-historical, following the end of history and the Anthropocene. In this way, the Posthuman Master Slave Dynamic works to replace power structures lost through historical trauma; it asserts a hegemonic categorization of personhood which perpetually Others those who are outside of it and are unable to assimilate. *Ergo Proxy*, however, ends in the collapse of power. In the breakdown of hegemony, masters cannot hold slaves, for power and identity become diffused across posthuman subjectivities. The ending of *Ergo Proxy* shows more true type of posthumanism, in which the un-moored Pseudohumans and Cogito-infected Autoreivs must contend with their hybrid identities. The center of power is destroyed, and everyone lies at the periphery.

However, this dynamic becomes complicated when gender is introduced. In *Ergo Proxy*, the issues of a gendered master-slave relationship never seriously come into play. There are several reasons why. One could say that gender itself within Domed society is deemphasized as a social concept. Due to artificial reproduction, the biological imperative of reproduction of cis-gendered women is made obsolete, and as a result, there is less of a social desire to place women as mothers or wives, or as men as fathers or husbands. Although there are gendered relationships (see: Raul Creed and his wife) there is rarely an occurrence between a male-human and female-android which would

lead one to think that a gendered hierarchy is being built. Although Re-L is hystericized at one point, this does not entirely relate to her relationship with Iggy, her Companion Auto-Reiv, nor the larger dynamic between humans and androids. Additionally, although Auto-Reivs are granted “cultural genitals,” which is to say, external qualities of gender, their gender is not very important to their role or relationships.

Gender, however, is largely a tool of power, and as such, fits within the constellation of the Posthuman Master Slave Dynamic. If one considers the power structure of men and women, especially within Japanese society in the early 2000s, then it becomes easy to map these social relations onto pop culture media works. It is a given that speculative fiction and pop culture are created within a context and refract the dreams and anxieties of their context. Thus, in the next section I will be discussing gender within the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic, and how it functions within an environment of patriarchal hierarchy and fascist aesthetics.

## CHAPTER 2

### LOYAL BODIES: GUNSLINGER GIRL AND FUTURISM'S ANIME LEGACY

#### 2.1 Introduction

Now that I have established a model to talk about the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic, I will now develop it further. In *Ergo Proxy*, the issue of gender was not particularly applicable; however, the two series that I will discuss here are very much rooted in gender. The gendered—although posthuman—body becomes subject to dynamics of mastery. As such, the powers which control bodies are more invested in upholding a patriarchal status quo. In this chapter, I will be exploring two anime texts: *Gunslinger Girl* (2003) and *Mahoromatic* (2001). Each of these texts falls within the “action sci-fi” genre and features mechanized girls who perform acts of warlike violence. As I indicated in the introduction, these girls are also, through the process of becoming posthuman, placed into a power hierarchy. I will be exploring the contours of power and gender as they are presented in these anime series in order to lend evidence to my larger line of argumentation.

I will show how within the framework of the gendered Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic, women's bodies are mechanized for violence for two purposes: to protect the gendered status quo and to create an idealized conception of the body. This perfected body works to strengthen and protect the *national* body (in Japanese, *kokutai*) at the expense of the *individual* body (*karada*: body, or, *kojintekina karada*: personal body). To articulate these points, I will be engaging with several theoretical models to expose the logic of domination which forms the substructure of these texts. I will explicate the philosophy of the early 20th century Italian Futurists, specifically their conceptions of the human body and its relationship to the state, war, and technology, as well as women's roles within this system. Considering that both of these anime series involve machines,

war, and fascistic bodies of power, the Futurists provide a useful frame by which to critically examine these media. Additionally, the fact that *Gunslinger Girl* takes place in Italy (the birthplace of both Futurism and Fascism) and deals with the aesthetic fetishization of war and bodies, makes the work of the Futurists even more important to consider. As such I will interrogate the aesthetics of Futurism and fascism as they are played out in these anime works. In addition to the Futurist scholarship, I will use the work of Michel Foucault, in particular his chapter “Power over Life and Death.” I will show how the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic functions through an interplay of the disciplining of bodies and the regulation of populations. By engaging with these two theoretical traditions, my aim is to argue my larger point: that in Japanese science fiction anime, posthuman women are often used as tools of patriarchy, reflecting a deeper desire to control women’s bodies and fortify the male-human subject in a state of confusion following the thickening of posthumanism in society.

Here, I will introduce the first work, *Gunslinger Girl*, with some bibliographic and plot details, before moving to my analysis. The TV-anime *Gunslinger Girl* is an adaptation of a Japanese manga series created by Aida Yu, which ran in the magazine *Dengeki Daioh* from May 21, 2002 to September 27, 2012. The anime adaptation was created in two parts, or seasons. The first season ran from October 9, 2003 to February 19, 2004 and was directed by Asaka Morio and produced by Madhouse Inc. The second season, under the subtitle *-II Teatrino-*, was made several years after the first season aired, from January 8, 2008 to April 1, 2008. A different company did the production for this season, Artland, along with a different director, Ishidori Hiroshi. Interestingly, Aida Yu, the creator of the source manga, wrote the script for the second season. Both seasons contain thirteen episodes, for a total of twenty-six episodes. For the purpose of this chapter and thesis project, I will be focusing on the first season of the series, as I found it be more thematically resonant and concise.



*Gunslinger Girl* largely takes place in Italy during an unspecified period in the future in which bio-technologies have advanced greatly. Curiously, it is a Japanese animation which takes place almost entirely outside of Japan. To emphasize this point, every episode title is rendered both in Italian and English. In *Gunslinger Girl*, the Italian government sponsors a paramilitary organization, known colloquially as the “Social Welfare Agency,” which creates cyborg soldiers from young girls to uphold its rule and stifle political dissent. These cyborgs perform this function by going out on missions, which often involve either the assassination of key terrorist leaders and opposition party politicians, or the infiltration of enemy bases. In both of these assignments, the mission requires the cyborgs to perform acts of violence, including murder and kidnapping. The series tracks the lives and missions of these cyborgs alongside their human Handlers. The Handlers function as “point men:” leading the cyborgs to their missions and providing them support, as well as training. The pairing of Handler and Cyborg forms a special kind of bond, a “*fratello*,” in the show’s terminology, which is Italian for “sibling.”<sup>56</sup> Each of these *fratello* relationships, or *fratelli* (pl.) is explored in the show, along with the psychological and emotional baggage that accompanies this sort of unique pairing.

There is no overarching plot across the two seasons of the anime, although each season contains sub-plots which are resolved. In season one, there is the mystery of a murdered cyborg and her Handler; and in season two, the plot surrounds a terrorist bomb-making duo and their emotionless boy assassin-escort. What unites the two seasons are the Gunslinger Girls themselves and the questions which surround their material existences. Specifically, the seasons deal with the morality behind their “cyborgization,” the nature of their new bodies and minds, and the relationships between each other and their Handlers. The seasons also endeavor to show the means by which

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<sup>56</sup> The Japanese term for this relationship is *kyōdai*, which is used in the Japanese title for the episode “*Fratello*.”

these girls are used as pawns in increasingly complex games of political espionage, murder, and deceit. I will describe specific scenes and plot points as they become relevant in my discussion, but the basic structure of *Human-male-master-handler* and *Cyborg-female-slave-assassin* is critical for an understanding of the power structures at hand.

## 2.2 Conditioning Loyal Bodies

The cyborg girls of *Gunslinger Girl* are “real” girls plucked from the world and made into cyborg proxies with which the Italian government manipulates the realms of war and politics. The process of becoming a cyborg—or rather—being *made into* a cyborg is a significant part of the show. The girls themselves, before they are “rescued” by the Agency, are usually victims of physical or sexual abuse. These girls are often very young, with ages ranging roughly from 12 to 15 years old. They are brought in extremely traumatized by their experience and on the brink of death. Cast aside by their parents, guardians, or whatever entity took responsibility for them in the past, the Agency brings them into a new sort of “found family” with their Handlers. Before this is done, however, there are several steps of cyborgization.

The girls are first surgically implanted with physical modifications which makes their bodies stronger, more agile, and easily repairable. This process gives them new life and refits them with a newer, more perfect body. Certain body parts are removed permanently, especially those which do not serve a combat function: in the case of the cyborg Henrietta (whose Handler is Giuseppe), it is her womb, a point to which I will return later. Afterwards they undergo “conditioning,”<sup>57</sup> which involves both

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<sup>57</sup> Conditioning, or *Jōkentsuke* (条件付け) carries with it the implication of physical conditioning, as well as mental, not unlike that which a martial artists or soldier would undergo. So, on the one hand “conditioning” connotes the literal attaching (*tsuke*) of conditions, or prerequisites (*jōken*) for cyborg-hood, the term could also be understood to position the girls

pharmaceutical and surgical procedures. Their memories are wiped, as well as their previous senses of self. New personalities are then grafted. The cyborgs are also then trained to “control their emotions,” which is an aspect of dehumanization I have discussed in *Ergo Proxy*. In other words, their affect is flattened as a means to make them both more logical and tactical, but also, less human and more easily controlled. During this process they are assigned their Handler, who leads them during operations, takes care of their emotional wellbeing, and directs their training. As the show explains, “Handlers are not easy to replace,”<sup>58</sup> the mind of the cyborg girl is literally reformed around their specific Handler. The girls are bonded to their unmechanized human master, and in the process, made to be non-humans.

The conditioning process instills unwavering loyalty to their Handler, which is often expressed in an obsessive drive to please them. This notion is coded into the term used to describe the cyborg girls: *gitai* (義体). In ordinary parlance, the word *gitai* refers to a cyborg, or artificial body. However, one can disclose certain nuances upon examining the word more thoroughly. The *tai* (体) in *gitai* means body; however, the *gi* (義) can be translated on its own in several ways. One possible meaning of *gi* is “loyal” or “loyalty” as in the word *gimu* (義務), a noun which translates to “loyalty.” Therefore, the cyborg girls are *gitai*, or “loyal bodies.” Their bodies, through conditioning, or *jōkentsuke*, are created as beings who are at their core loyal to their masters. This process of loyal-body creation can also result in romantic feelings, which occurs in the case of Henrietta, towards her Handler, Giuseppe, (whom she calls Giuse). Henrietta grows to love Giuse,

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within a tradition of hardening one’s body and mind for the purpose of bettering the self. This distinction is never brought up in the anime, though it is interesting to consider as a means by which a tyrannical agency seeks to justify its own means.

<sup>58</sup> *Gunslinger Girl*. “Promise.” Directed by Asaka Morio. Madhouse Studios. November 20, 2003.

and as the series progresses, we see this represented in embarrassed blushes when talking to or about Giuse, and the desire to always please him and be around him. The compulsion to protect their Handler is also grafted deep within the psyche of the girls, such that to do so is an autonomic process. We can see this in episode 9,<sup>59</sup> when the cyborg Triela defends against a perceived threat against her Handler, Victor; she goes into a kind of combat trance and violently defends him against another cyborg girl, who merely brushes against him. Triela does not kill the other girl, but nearly does; the danger of the encounter haunts both of their Handlers. The final process of cyborgization is the naming of the girl. "Each cyborg is named by their Handlers,"<sup>60</sup> making the girl "his" and finalizing the erasure of the previous self. Once the Cyborg Girl is named, she is ready to begin training to become an assassin, and The Agency has completed its stripping of agency. Through the process of Conditioning, the cyborg girls are effectively made into puppets whose strings are held by their Handlers, a concept I will explore more in the coming pages. However, the act of naming the cyborg girls is significant and warrants more discussion.

As I have stated, during the process of cyborgization, the *Gunslinger Girl* is hollowed out: physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Memories of her past remain in bits and pieces, usually emerging during moments of trauma. Henrietta recalls a bit of the violent and sexual abuse which led her to the Agency, but without the emotional coupling; they are as if, to her, seen from the perspective of an observer. Importantly, part of the memory which is lost during the process of conditioning is the cyborg girl's name. When a Handler is given a cyborg, he renames her. Rico's Handler, for instance,

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<sup>59</sup> *Gunslinger Girl*. "Cluster Amaryllis." Directed by Asaka Morio. Madhouse Studios. January 15, 2004.

<sup>60</sup> *Gunslinger Girl*. "To love." Directed by Asaka Morio. Madhouse Studios. January 29, 2004.

gives her a boy's name, for reasons which are not made entirely clear, though we are led to assume that the name "Rico" contains some personal significance. Certain other names are given for aesthetic reasons, such as the cyborg Angela's: she is a beautiful young girl, and her Handler wished (before his death) that she be designated with a name to emphasize her grace. However, the act of naming one's cyborg could be understood as the final step of a paradoxical and complex process: to "humanize" a being whose humanity has been stripped, and through that, to actually dehumanize her and further make her into a puppet-like tool.



Figure 5: A handler (Giuseppe, left) with his cyborg (Henrietta, right).

Jennifer Robertson, in her book *Robo Sapiens Japonicus*, discusses the process of giving robots names, in a culturally specific manner. The ways that humans give names to robots betrays an inherent power dynamic. By naming a robot, one brings them into the world of humanity, ostensibly placing them in an equivalence position. As Robertson states, "*Naming* and gendering are intertwined processes of *reality construction*...robots are created as subjects of a social order in which they perform a

repertoire of roles that maintain the status quo.”<sup>61</sup> [emphasis added] The girls are given names, and in return, are re-made as servants. Their names define who they are what they are supposed to do in the world: obey their Handlers. I will return to the process of “gendering” robots, cyborgs, and androids later in this thesis, because in *Gunslinger Girl*, unlike robots, the girls are already gendered girls. Even though Rico is given a “boy’s” name, she is portrayed as a girl by the show. She is addressed using female pronouns, and presents feminine, albeit a bit more masculine compared to the other cyborgs. This naming process is, on the surface, a giving of humanity; however, it more resembles a pet-relationship. One gives a name to an animal to “own” it more tangibly. Giving something a name allows one a certain power over it. The Handlers use the language of humanity to bind non-humans into their service, thus reifying a divide between the two. These names, however, are not only the language of humanity, but the language of men. In this way, the Handlers bind the cyborg girls into a phallogocentric contract in which the “logos” or “logic” of the men is privileged in the construction of their identity. In *Gunslinger Girl*, naming a girl makes them entirely the property of their Handler and of the Agency, for the sum of their identity at that point is regulated by an implanted loyalty to the matrix of masculine power. Names imply ownership, and this ownership makes the cyborg girls less human, and their male Handler masters more so through comparison, another point which will become clearer in the later chapter on the anime, *Ergo Proxy*.

This process of “saving” a dying girl and turning her into a cyborg is merely a procedure of creating a slave-like military-labor force who resemble puppets. This notion is self-reflexively alluded to by the subtitle of the second season of the series: “il teatrino” which translated to “the theater.” Specifically, this kind of theater refers to a “puppet

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<sup>61</sup> Robertson, Jennifer, *Robo Sapiens Japonicus*, University of California Press: 2018, 89/90.

theater.” I connect this foregrounding of artificiality with the artistry of *bunraku* theater, in which humans visibly manipulate the limbs and movements of wooden puppets.

*Gunslinger Girl*, in this way, resembles a *bunraku* performance in that, a puppet-like figure acts through manipulations of a human subject.<sup>62</sup> However, the ghost of the Handlers haunts every aspect of the girls’ lives; the series, even in moments of leisure, lays bare the strings. Like *bunraku*, the humans may disappear into the scenery, but they are not forgotten.

Through the process of cyborgization and conditioning, a perfect body is created. The human body, through technology, becomes a transformed object to be wielded by the powers of the state. The girls are used for killing political enemies of the state: politicians and radical terrorist groups alike. However, keeping in line with the language of the Futurist Manifesto, the Girls also embody the need for constant change, evolution, and obsolescence. Their bodies are modifiable and are constantly brought in for testing, repair, and upgrades. Something which cannot be changed, however, is their impending mortality. Due to the process of cyborgization and conditioning, the Girls have a dramatically reduced lifespan: generally of only a few years.<sup>63</sup> Over time their bodies break down and their memory begins to fail, which the Agency simply explains as a “side effect of cybernetic transformation.”<sup>64</sup> One Girl, Angela, is shown in an advanced stage of memory loss, forgetting another Girl’s name mid-conversation. They are unable to grow up both mentally and physically, and remain a child until their death, either from a

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<sup>62</sup> Tomoo Ueno and Hisashi Miura. *Bunraku*. Films for the Humanities and Sciences: 2002.

<sup>63</sup> *Gunslinger Girl*. “Promise.” Directed by Asaka Morio. Madhouse Studios. November 20, 2003.

<sup>64</sup> *Gunslinger Girl*. “The Prince of the Pasta Kingdom.” Directed by Asaka Morio. Madhouse Studios. December 18, 2003.

mission or from becoming so decrepit that they are retired. In effect, they remain a child of the same age they were made into a cyborg forever.

Through using critical conceptions of the *shōjo* and the *sentō bishōjo* (beautiful fighting girl), as outlined by scholars such as Frenchy Lunning and Saito Tamaki respectively, one can dive “beneath the ruffles”<sup>65</sup> (or the artificial skin) to understand what makes the *Gunslinger Girl* such a potent manifestation of power and male desire. According to Lunning in her essay “Under the Ruffles: Shōjo and the Morphology of Power,” the figure of the *shōjo* occupies an “abject position.”<sup>66</sup> She is a distillation of femininity, outside of the reproductive imperative, around which a “constellation”<sup>67</sup> of images, marketing, and fandom accretes. She is something which the patriarchy simultaneously rejects and constructs. However, because the figure of the *shōjo* is something constructed for commercial consumption-an artificial body, without agency or a solid identity-Lunning declares a “lack of center” to the *shōjo*. She claims that the *shōjo* is a “black hole” at “the center of this swirling universe of objects”<sup>68</sup> and is essentially an empty signifier.

This notion of “emptiness” is picked up in Tamaki Saito’s book *Beautiful Fighting Girl*. Although his argument utilizes Lacanian psychoanalysis, I will be using the basic framework of his thinking, albeit in a different way: the *shōjo* who fights, or Beautiful Fighting Girl (BFG), is an attractive and pivotal piece of visual and popular culture because it is a “being in a state of lack.”<sup>69</sup> The BFG is an empty figure-a vessel-into

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<sup>65</sup> Frenchy, Lunning. “Under the Ruffles: Shōjo and the Morphology of Power.” Mechademia: 2011.

<sup>66</sup> Lunning, *Ruffles*, 4

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Lunning, *Ruffles*, 18

<sup>69</sup> Tamaki Saito, *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, University of Minnesota Press: 2011, 166.



which desire can be inserted and plays of fantasy can be inscribed. The BFG, like the *shōjo* itself, can be anywhere and anything; she is modifiable and gaseous. Her ability to fight, however, makes her dangerous and somehow appealing. Saito makes a connection between the BFG and the so-called “phallic mother” of psychoanalysis, making her into a “phallic girl.”<sup>70</sup> While I will not be employing this exact critical lens, this notion of emptiness and desire fits well with my reading of *Gunslinger Girl*.

Through the process of conditioning, the Cyborg Girl is hollowed out, both physically and psychologically. Her body is replaced with a not only artificial body, but one whose capabilities exceed that of the normal human. Henrietta, specially, is hollowed out in that her womb is removed; she is placed then outside of the reproductive imperative, and in a way, outside of the human sphere. While this connection between reproduction and humanity is something I will explore elsewhere in this thesis, I will make the preliminary argument that reproduction and humanity are very tightly knotted, and that to place a woman, or any reproducing person, outside of reproduction is to place them outside of humanity. Since the Beautiful Fighting Girl, or *Gunslinger Girl*, is a vessel to be prefigured and rewired according to taste, she is at the whim of patriarchy. In the series, these systems of masculine desire and power find purchase in the Social Welfare Agency and its Handler agents. The Agency is essentially made to be a puppet-maker, while the Handlers form the hands which manipulate the strings.

However, to simply understand what the process of condition *does* to these girls ignores a simple fact: that they are *girls* to begin with. This is to say, these cyborgs are young, pre-pubescent girls, inhabiting a space quite different than full grown adult women. Therefore, it is important to understand these characters through this specific framework: as girls—not women—made into weapons for war. Amanda Landa talks

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<sup>70</sup> Saito, *Beautiful*, 167

about the idea of posthuman children turned into weapons for war in her paper *Mechanized Bodies of Adolescence: Weaponized Children, National Allegory and Japanese Anime*. In this paper she undergoes a treatment of the anime *Akira*, *Saikano*, and *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*. She asserts that children, when forcibly made posthuman, signals an anxiety over the present. That “violent transformation on the site of the child’s body—the future of the nation” creates a sense that the future is precarious, gesturing towards a feeling of “insecurity of one’s own future.”<sup>71</sup> This is to say, children, when placed in these “volatile worlds,”<sup>72</sup> are symbolic of the collapse of a sense of the everyday. One can apply this very easily to early 2000s Japan, and the sense of precarity. I thus contend that these cyborg assassins are *girls* specifically due to the same reasons that Landa argues for: the cyborgization and weaponization of children signals a sense that the future is either lost or in a state of immense precarity. The organization attempts to use these girls in order to further the aims of the state, creating a “better future” by a totalitarian definition. In the process of doing so, however, both the organization and the Handlers actually destroy the possibility of a better future, instead sending it spiraling into cycles of endless violence.

### **2.3 Social Welfare Masters: “A Gun That Can Smile”**

Now that I have presented the conditions of the puppets, and the strings appended to them, I will now investigate further the hands which wield them: The Agency and the Handlers. The Social Welfare Agency, as its name suggests, masquerades as an arm of the government which works towards providing aid to children in need. When Henrietta was acquired, she was taken from the hospital under

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<sup>71</sup> Amanda Landa, “Mechanized Bodies of Adolescence: Weaponized Children, National Allegory, and Japanese Anime,” *Red Feather Journal* 3, no.2 (2012): 16.

<sup>72</sup> Landa, *a*, 17.

the assumption that she would be placed into foster care.<sup>73</sup> In the second season, there is a conversation between members of the agency and individuals critical of it, where the Agency representatives make the claim that the scientific advancements made in the process of creating cyborgs will eventually come to benefit all of society.<sup>74</sup> A statement like this deserves unpacking, and situating within post humanist and transhumanist discourse. As Donna Haraway states in her cyborg manifesto, technology has provided a means by which all people have become cyborgs; in her wording, “modern medicine is also full of cyborgs.”<sup>75</sup> Medical technologies have made it so that people with prosthetics, pacemakers, and other bio-technological solutions are posthuman, for their daily and bodily life requires the use of technology. Using the logic of Haraway, we can understand that in the Agency’s reckoning, their creation of cyborg-girls both helps ailing bodies and at the same time propel the world towards a fully cyborgized society. At that point, the divide between “pure” human and machine would dissolve, for everyone would exist in a state of technological fusion. However, this would appear to be a deception, and in fact, a warrant for the domination of bodies, a far-cry from the liberating politics of Haraway’s cyborg.

The structure of the Agency itself is important as well, for by the very nature of its organization, the logic of technologically mediated patriarchy is made apparent, and the Master-Slave Dynamic takes on its gendered approach. Each of the male Handlers comes from not only a diverse national background (Italian, German, French, etc.) but from martial careers as well. Several men have backgrounds in the militaries of various

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<sup>73</sup> *Gunslinger Girl*. “Siblings.” Directed by Asaka Morio. Madhouse Studios. October 9, 2003.

<sup>74</sup> *Gunslinger Girl*. “Symbiosis,” Directed by Asaka Morio. Madhouse Studios. February 12, 2004.

<sup>75</sup> Haraway, Donna. “A Manifesto for Cyborgs.” *The Cybercultures Reader*, Routledge: 2000, 291.

nations, some have had police careers, and others participated in political and military espionage. In the fiction of *Gunslinger Girl*, these men have all gathered from their disparate backgrounds to work for the Italian government. In addition, without exception, each Handlers left these previous positions due to tragedy or personal failings; because of this, they had to leave their home countries and found themselves working for the Italian government by proxy, via the “Social Welfare Agency.”

Building on the work of the cultural anthropologists Jennifer Robertson and Anne Allison, I state in Japan, the concept of masculinity itself is tied inextricably with work and the workplace. Following the loss of employment, the loss of a sense of masculinity in working males, or “salarymen,” is inevitable. This is a dynamic that I will engage with throughout this thesis project, though here I present the argument in one form as it relates to *Gunslinger Girl*. That is to say, the Handlers who have come to the Agency have done so due to a lack in their perceptions of their own masculinity. They have lost their masculine identity and seek to reclaim it through participating in the world in a familiar mode: violence, surveillance, etc. Through the process of joining the agency they are given a cyborg girl as a kind of dual-purpose membership token/item of state. They come to co-create this girl in the image of something they wish to control; they design a weapon which functions as the symbolic phallus (i.e., gun) they have lost through the vicissitudes of their past. In this regard, what Saito proposes as the “phallic girl,” which is to say, “a thoroughly vacant being...in a position very much like that of a medium,” seems to hold some truth. The Gunslinger girls “function to mediate the other world,”<sup>76</sup> which in this case is the world of masculinity and violence. The Handlers then name their girl and treat her in whatever way they want. In the case of Giuse, he treats Henrietta as a younger sister, and in the case of Jean towards Rico, as a gun that

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<sup>76</sup> Saito, *Beautiful*, 160.

smiles. The male Handlers create slaves from their cyborg girls to assert a loss sense of masculine identity. They do this, however, without eliciting sex or romance from the girls: it is a purely platonic re-masculizing process, using the girls as a salve for their damaged masculinity or phallus. This is for the best, as the age difference between the Handlers and the cyborgs would make for a highly problematic pairing.

There is, however, a plot point of the anime which presents an interesting answer to this dynamic. Towards the end of the first season, a mystery surrounding the death of a Handler and his cyborg becomes a major story element. Through an investigation of the crime-scene, in which both individuals lie dead from bullet wounds, and of the dynamic between the Handler and cyborg, it is learned that the murder is a murder-suicide perpetrated by the cyborg girl. Through several episodes of flashbacks, the viewers are given an image of a relationship between a human and cyborg in which the human Handler found his cyborg entirely abject and undeserving of human affection. Due to the process of conditioning, the girl continually expressed feelings of love and admiration, only to have them unreciprocated. Her Handler frequently claimed that there was “no need”<sup>77</sup> to show love or affection towards a cyborg. A recurring shot of the cyborg’s empty room save for a photograph of the Handler, taken of his face in the rear-view mirror of car, asserts the crushing feelings of loneliness felt by the girl. One day, during a walk in the woods towards an assignment, the cyborg girl snaps and kills her Handler and then herself.

On one hand, we can see this act of rebellion as a cutting of the strings. Although the cyborg girls are stronger and swifter than their Handler masters, the conditioning prevents them from retaliating for abuse. This momentary lapse in this particular girl’s programming gives a slim glimpse into a world in which the masculinity re-gained by the

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<sup>77</sup> *Gunslinger Girl*. “Cluster Amaryllis.” Directed by Asaka Morio. Madhouse Studios. January 15, 2004.

enslavement of cyborg girls proves without substance. By turning the gun back upon the Master, this phallic reclamation doubles back upon itself, leading to death: the ultimate castration. Through revolt, even by penalty of death, *Gunslinger Girl* avers that the Master-Slave dynamic can be inverted. However, when the truth behind the deaths is learned, the Agency quickly covers it up and destroys all knowledge that contradicts a simple murder from outside the Agency. Even when the systems of domination are unsteadied from within, while the power structures remain to uphold them, they can always be bulwarked; with network of control supporting it, any structural damage to the base of technologically-mediated patriarchy proves to be short lived. Though the cyborg girl broke her chains, she could not live without them.

## 2.4 The Biopower of Cyborgs

*Gunslinger Girl* lends itself to a discussion of bodies, and the manipulation of those bodies. Michel Foucault, in his work “Power Over Life and Death,” articulates a system of power over bodies which proves highly productive in an understanding of this work. I will employ the rhetoric of Michel Foucault in my reading of *Gunslinger Girl*, in order to synthesize Futurism’s determination of the worth of bodies, with Foucault’s understanding of the systems of power and politics which dominate them. In *Gunslinger Girl*, bodies are utilized as tools of a larger “apparatus<sup>78</sup> of power. In this case, I define apparatus as the numerous arms of power which power uses to manipulate the world. This apparatus is The Agency; Power stems from the Italian Government, which works through the agency as a proxy. Through the Futurist impulse to subjugate bodies, this fascist government, I argue, wields power over life and death. Their biopower is a “right

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<sup>78</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vintage Books: 1988. 144

of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself.”<sup>79</sup> The agency literally seizes the bodies of young girls and transforms them into weapons of the state. Their previous lives are erased, and their existences become reduced, essentialized, and marginalized. Foucault makes the claim that biopower, reduced to its finest points, is marked by the “subjugation of bodies and the control of populations.”<sup>80</sup> It is in this mode that the cyborg girls’ bodies are handled and made to be not their own.

Through the twin dynamics of *anatomo-politics* and *bio-politics*, outlined in “Power over Life and Death,” we can understand the dynamic of the Futurist bio-power at play. The “body as machine” of the cyborg girls is an aspect of their being which is used to discipline their lives as wards of the fascist state. The process of conditioning is a process of *disciplining* the body and the mind. Additionally, this process also functions as a means of *social* conditioning, whereby the group of girls, who could theoretically be any given girl, become regulated to a single mode of being and a single type of relation between themselves and their handlers: as weapons, either currently firing upon enemies of the state or waiting to be discharged. The dream of the perfect body, as articulated by the Futurist imagination, is realized by the cyborgization of these young girls, because it is achieved through pushing a human body beyond human limits, while at the same time still being able to be controlled and utilized for war.

Weapons for inflicting warlike violence have the same potential for upholding patriarchal structures. This is because violence is often coded male, where the inverse of war (the home; peace; stability) is coded female. Haraway writes that war, colonialism, and patriarchy are a tightly matched triptych of “progress” and “modernity.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*, 136

<sup>80</sup> Ibid 140.

<sup>81</sup> Haraway, *Cyborg*, 293.

*Gunslinger Girl*, however, inverts this dynamic. It is the girls of the anime, the cyborgs, who offer their bodies towards the goal of inflicting mass violence. The process of cyborgization is made to seem normalized, for it is good for both the state and medical technology<sup>82</sup>: the ability to create highly efficient prosthetics. As Foucault wrote, "Wars... are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone... in the name of life necessity."<sup>83</sup> War becomes the mode by which the subjugation of bodies is transformed into a praxis of regulating political power.

## 2.5 The Futurist Imag(in)ing

I will reiterate here that the relationship between the cyborg girls and their Handlers constitutes a Posthuman Master Slave Dynamic. However, both the violence which the girls are dispensed to perform and the reasoning behind that violence evokes fascistic imagery. They are not merely cyborgs, but cyborg assassins. Furthermore, they are cyborg assassins who commit political murder for the benefit of the Italian government. The connection between the politics of *Gunslinger Girl* and Fascism is made more potent for two reasons. The first is due to the fact that Italy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was ruled by a fascist regime. The second is the that in *Gunslinger Girl*, the government uses violence to maintain control over bodies and information. In this way, we can begin to understand the PMSD as a product of fascism being made aesthetic. However, a more productive comparison can be made, not with "pure" fascism, but rather, with Futurism, the literary and artistic movement which internalized the logic and

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<sup>82</sup> As Amanda Seaman writes in *Bodies of Evidence*, (referenced in the previous chapter) medical technologies, such as artificial reproduction, serves mainly as a means to "control women" by regulating the usage of their bodies. A similar argument is made by Ann Balsamo in *Technologies of the Gendered Body*, in which the discourse of bodies in medical technologies advertised towards women create a dynamic in which the posthuman imaginary becomes utilized as an apparatus of the patriarchy, towards the goal of regulating women's sense of self and entitlement over their own bodies.

<sup>83</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*. 137.



motivations of Fascism in the process of articulating an aesthetic movement. In the following section I will detour briefly to expound upon the finer nuances of Futurism and the fascist underpinnings of this ideology. From there, I will continue my critique of *Gunslinger Girl*, while applying Futurist imagery and concepts. *Gunslinger Girl*, in its treatment of gender, bodies, and war echoes and reinterprets many of the sentiments proposed by the Futurists. When synthesized with Foucault's understanding of the systems of power and politics which allow for the domination of bodies, one can begin to understand the relationships in the show as acting out Fascist aesthetics.

It is no accident that this work takes place in Italy and deals with bodies at war in a society where the boundaries between advanced technology and the human form have become more permeable. Through my explication of Foucault, I have showed that *Gunslinger Girl* positions the body in a state of powerlessness; I will now show how that powerlessness becomes aestheticized. It would be beyond the scope of this chapter to outline in detail the development of fascism in Europe and Asia. As such, I will focus on the theoretical aspects of fascism, and the aesthetics. It is not my intention to take a stance on whether or not Japan has been fascist; my aim here is only to pinpoint fascistic tendencies in a work produced in Japan. However, before discussing fascism, I must address its antecedent: Futurism.

Futurism was an aesthetic and intellectual movement in early 20th century Italy, envisioned by a small group of artists and theorists. I will emphasize here that futurism was largely the prism of a period of artistic production: it was an aesthetic, which resonated deeply with the fascist party which eventually took hold in Italy. The Futurist Manifesto, published in 1909, outlined a way of thinking about art and culture which radically contrasted with prevailing attitudes. The document lays out eleven tenets of Futurism which at once glorify war and technology, while at the same time vilifying institutions and women.

One of the foundational Futurists, Filippo Tommaso Emilio Marinetti, conceived of Futurism as an ideology which fetishized a kind of society which eternally looped between newness and obsolescence. This sort of world would continually renew itself through the destruction of the old and the creation of new ideas and structures to replace them. In this cosmology, the future cannot exist without the destruction of the past and the subjugation of bodies, particularly women bodies. According to [scholar] Japan received the aesthetic of futurism with open arms. The year of its original publication in Italian, the Japanese novelist Mori Ogai translated it into Japanese. Futurism thus became one of the original springboards of high-modernist literature in Japan. Therefore, it is not unreasonable that the logic of futurism would wind its way into contemporary Japanese pop culture productions.

There are eleven tenants listed in the manifesto, each of which explicates the tenants of technological fascism. Here I will explain a few key tenants:

3. Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt *aggressive action*, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap, *the punch and the slap*.
7. Except in *struggle*, there is no more beauty. No work without an *aggressive character* can be a masterpiece. Poetry must be conceived as a *violent attack* on unknown forces, to reduce and prostrate them before man.
8. We stand on the last promontory of the centuries! ... Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.
9. *We will glorify war—the world's only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman.*
10. We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, *feminism*, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice. [emphasis added in each case]

Established before the founding of Mussolini's Fascist Party and Hitler's Nazi Party, Futurism laid the groundwork for fascist ideations of culture and society. The "Manifesto" advocated for a worship of war and a subsuming of the individual towards an

endlessly moving and evolving national body. The Futurists emphasize “work” and “aggressive action” towards the production of cultural works and nation-building. Vivien Greene, in the exhibition catalog, *Italian Futurism 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe*, states that the Futurists “celebration of war as a means to remake Italy”<sup>84</sup> guided the “narrative” of their ideals, placing equal importance in the aestheticization of conflict and “movement” as they did on the creation of a powerful, masculine state. In this way, one can think of Futurism as the synthesis of posthumanism and of fascist aesthetics. Both technology as a practice and the machine of war become the totalizing body of governance. The love of war and the desire to funnel human experience under a totality characterize the futurists as fascists. The Futurists’ love of machinery, momentum, and of pushing the human beyond the limits of the physical body align closely with the posthumanist conception of a new human subject as mediated by technologies and new material relations between people and their environment.

This relationship with technology finds a partner in the Nazi ideology, particularly in one piece of propaganda film: *Triumph des Willens (Triumph of the Will)*.<sup>85</sup> The opening scene of the film comprises an extended shot of a plane moving through clear skies. Triumphant music plays as the plane soars gracefully, eventually landing on the ground to a large crowd of people. As the people cheer, a group of Nazis exit the plane, one of whom is Hitler himself. This scene is emblematic of both Fascist and Futurist conceptions of technology and the body. The fascist body is borne by the steel, masculine shell of the plane through space. Technology allows the body to move in spaces and at speeds which previously would be impossible. When the plane lands, the Nazi are literally born from the plane, making the connection between the body and

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<sup>84</sup> Vivian Greene, *Italian Futurism*, New York, Guggenheim Museum Publications: 2014, 21.

<sup>85</sup> Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will*, Das Dokument Vom Reichsparteitag: 1934.

technology such that, humanity creates technology as much as technology creates humanity; mediation through technology becomes a predicate of being human at all. The individual body, however, loses its signifier: the plane bears us all, and the Fascist *national* body provides for all, so that the singular subject is trampled by the crowd and the powerful forces which guide human life. Italian futurism and German Nazism implicate the individual body on the scale of the national body; through a fusion with technology and a giving over of agency towards the machines of war and fascism, power can be consolidated on the national level.

The use of cyborg-military-labor for warlike purposes, however, poses an additional interesting inversion when one considers the new Cyborg subject which Haraway proposes. Donna Haraway, in her assessment of the nature of cyborgs, states that cyborgs, while born from patriarchy, imperialism, and war, can be appropriated for use as a rhetoric to imagine a human subject unbound from those historical, political, and gendered systems. In the process of doing so, a kind of “post-gender world” is created from the rupture of traditional categories of humanity. The cyborg girls in this anime work turn back upon the original design of Haraway’s cyborg, which inverts the design of patriarchy and imperialism. They re-appropriate the image of the military-industrial cyborg to stoke the flames of war once again. By waging war against insurgents, terrorists of the state, and separatists, it is the Italian Government through the proxy of the Agency which deploys the bodies of these cyborg girls as walking artillery that reject the freeing aspects of Haraway’s cyborg. It suggests, in a way, that her notion of the cyborgian “post-gender” world cannot exist while patriarchal systems hold the means of technological production.

In the context of Japanese popular culture, “a post-gender world” is functionally impossible. A detailed explanation of the gender politics of manga and anime falls outside of the scope of this paper. Essentially, the mode of consumption in postmodern

Japan (though more specifically, Post-Bubble Japan) requires that media cater to a specific audience of *otaku*, or “super-fan.” These *otaku* fans demand a kind of female representation that can satisfy specific desires for “cuteness”, or *kawaii*. The scholar Sharon Hasegawa describes *kawaii* as a term which implies “something precious: something that we are drawn towards and which stimulates one’s feeling of wanting to protect something.”<sup>86</sup> The cyborg girls of *Gunslinger Girl* are dangerous and deadly, but they are also cute. They are permanently girls so that they can slip into the spaces that little girls are able to, and to be eternally at the command of older men, but also because their figures are pleasurable to consume in the *otaku*’s “database” model of consuming *moe*-elements.<sup>87</sup> Haraway claims that the figure of the cyborg has the potential to erase gender, although Japanese pop culture consistently finds ways to write it back in.

For this reason, the girls of *Gunslinger Girl* are designed to be forever controlled by the futurist patriarchy of the Handlers and Agency for the purpose of fueling war, controlling bodies, and maintaining the hierarchical divide between both human/machine and man/woman. For the Futurists, scorn of women aligns with scorn of “nostalgic” institutions: museums and literature, things which are, in the futurist imagination, coded feminine, whereas violence, energy, and movement are coded masculine and seen as desirable. Thus, to control girls and their bodies—to reduce them to their bodies—as objects, and as weapons to be deployed by the masculine agenda, is the ultimate futurist ideal. They fantasized about subsuming all things towards progress and violence, destroying sentimentality, and keeping these girls within a powerless framework. Next, I will now bring the anime *Mahoromatic* into this theoretical framework, to further develop

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<sup>86</sup> Yuko Hasegawa. "Post-identity *Kawaii*: Commerce, Gender and Contemporary Japanese Art." *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*. Ed. Fran Lloyd. London: Reaktion Books, 2002. 128.

<sup>87</sup> Azuma Hiroki, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. University of Minneapolis Press: 2009.

this idea of precarity as it applies to Posthuman girls, or more precisely, Posthuman girl-*weapons*.

*Mahoromatic*, like *Gunslinger Girl*, is an anime adaption of a manga series, which was published by Wani Books from 2000 to 2006, written by Nakayama Bunjuro and illustrated by Ditama Bow. The anime was joint produced by the studios Gainax and Shaft and both directed and written by Yamaga Hiroyuki. The series is, again like *Gunslinger Girl*, split into seasons. The first, with the subtitle “Automatic Maiden” ran on Japanese TV from October 6, 2001 to December 29 of the same year with twelve episodes. The second season, subtitled as “Something More Beautiful” ran from September 27, 2002 to January 17, 2003 with fourteen episodes, making the total for the series twenty-six.

*Mahoromatic* takes place in a near-future Japan, which until recently has been secretly fighting a war with an invading alien species. To more effectually fight the aliens, an organization known as Vesper developed a highly advanced fighter android, named “Mahoro:” a decision which turned the tide of the war and resulted in a relative stalemate. Years down the line, Mahoro is given a choice: either serve in battle for the remaining time her body can operate or become a civilian and live for about a year longer, to enjoy the time remaining. Mahoro chooses the latter option and goes to work as a maid for a young boy, Suguru. As the series progresses, we learn why she has made this choice: during her time as a combat android, Mahoro was forced to kill her commander to defeat a particularly powerful alien robot. Suguru happens to be that commander’s son and to make amends for a deed which has caused her significant guilt, she decides to enter a life of servitude to repay her self-imposed debt.



Figure 6: Mahoro as a maid.

The series largely follows a romantic-comedy formula, interspersed with moments of tragedy and action: for as the plot progress, and the relationship between Suguru and Mahoro deepens, elements of Mahoro's past creep into her current life. Underwriting the events of the story is Mahoro's impending death, which is represented by a title card following each episode, which shows her remaining battery level. The main thrust of the plot involves the war between humans and aliens, which intensifies around the time Mahoro goes to work for Suguru; the relationships between Mahoro and a cast of both human and non-human characters; and (in the second season) the machinations of a secret society of social engineers called "Management," who create cyborgs in order to fuel their ulterior goals of expanding the power of the human race. The series ends after a climactic battle between Mahoro and Management, during which Mahoro dies. Following this scene is an episode coda which jumps several decades into the future, in which Suguru, bitter and alone, travels across the futuristic human galaxy hunting androids. He is eventually reunited with Mahoro in a beguiling dreamlike sequence in which she is reborn from the collective alien consciousness, Matthew, and restored to Suguru's side.

Like *Gunslinger Girl*, *Mahoromatic* revolves around the themes of war, gender, and women, specifically the space women occupy in the theater of war. In GG, young girls were the instruments of war, whose bodies became the vessels of a fascist agenda whose arc bent towards maintaining a gendered status quo. The Posthuman-Master Slave Dynamic became the new paradigm of gender relations. Human girls were stripped of their humanity and forced to perform a social prescribed obsequiousness towards their male human masters. In the case of *Mahoro* however, the process of leaving behind war and entering the realm of humanity would ostensibly be an opportunity to break the Master Slave Paradigm. However, as I will show, the conditions of both her “birth” and entry into humanity force her yet into ever-concentric hierarchies of power and control. In Posthumanism, women are unable to be fully-human, for the economy of humanness resides within the domain of patriarchy. “Humanity” is instrumentalized towards the consolidation of masculine power and the marginalization of all who fall outside the “human.” *Gunslinger Girl* acts out the fantasy of becoming-cyborg, and *Mahoromatic* of android becoming-human. Each centers the experiences of *sentō bishōjo*, and the trials of their lives, both military and domestic. Both, however, establish that the conditions of becoming-anything take place within a constellation of male-desire and control.

## 2.6 Automatic Maiden

Mahoro is created as an instrument of war, in the shape of a woman. In Episode 1 of the series, it is revealed that Mahoro was developed as a response to the Matthew alien crisis, which began in the 1980s. In response to a foreign threat, a new kind of weapon was developed to give Vespers the advantage in combat. This kind of narrative is not uncommon in the science fiction of Japan; one need only look to the *mecha* genre of anime or manga to see a rich tradition of creating mechanical humanoids for waging



war. However, what is curious about Mahoro is her gender. In *Gunslinger Girl*, the cyborgs were born female and made into cyborgs: their genders were prescribed and unchanged. In *Mahoromatic*, the android was made specifically as a woman. To ask why *Mahoro* was created as a woman opens a larger line of questioning about the representation of women in Japanese sci fi and popular culture in general. As I have stated before, the figure of the *shōjo* presents itself often in Japanese popular culture; in science fiction and action genre works, the *sentō bishōjo* is more common; a “beautiful fighting girl.” Following my argument regarding the “empty” *sentō bishōjo* of *Gunslinger Girl*, I aver that Mahoro is a similarly empty android *sentō bishōjo*. She is created as a woman to fulfill the *otaku*, or, cultural consumerist, desires for a sexual and romantic fixture. The Organization of Vesper, which is comprised almost exclusively of men who fawn over her looks and personality, and throughout the series ask for status updates and diary entries, created Mahoro out of desire to create a “cute” weapon of war: one that is effective and deadly, but also feminine and controllable.



Figure 7: Members of Vesper, all male.

To use the theory of Azuma Hiroki, Mahoro contains several “*moe*-elements:” her face, which is rounded with wide eyes; and even her maid-costume, which is a common facet of characters who elicit a *moe* reaction from *otaku*. It could be said that the figure of Mahoro operates on two ontological levels: on the level of narrative of the show itself, where she is produced as a human simulacrum, representing “human” (read: male) values in order to fight the alien threat; and also on the level of a Japanese cultural production, in which she operates as a representation of a *moe*-figure which can be desired and controlled (by fans). She is mobilized both for violence and defense of national (rather, global) boundaries, in addition to be an instrument of *kawaii* and *moe*. Mahoro is thus created as a woman and is by her nature a Posthuman slave for the same reason.

Under Vesper, Mahoro is an instrument for defending humanity through war. However, this is violence which Vesper began, when confronted with the alien ‘invaders’: a designation problematized in the second season of the series. After a climactic battle between Mahoro and a Mathew-created (male) android, the audience learns that Matthew came originally for peace, yet were thwarted in this by the militaristic humans. As a result, the aliens went to war with the humans, which necessitated the creation of Mahoro. When Mahoro’s ‘service’ ends, she is given the option of living a normal human life for about a year--to “take off her armor”<sup>88</sup>--at which point she will power down and “die.” She chooses to become a maid out of guilt<sup>89</sup> for killing her commander during a

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<sup>88</sup> *Mahoromatic*. “In a Hydrangea Garden.” Directed by Yamaga Hiroyuki. Gainax.

<sup>89</sup> Mahoro’s guilt brings up an interesting issue: the issue of her sapience. The fact that she feels guilt for her actions makes her seem as if she is fully conscious. Throughout the anime, the issue of her artificial mind is never seriously discussed. It can be assumed that because she is a fusion of technology and a piece of the consciousness of Matthew, that Mahoro has the same affective capacities as “normal” humans. She is, for all intents and purposes, a feeling, rationalizing human, except in all the ways that she is kept from being entirely human.

battle. She becomes a maid to his son--in effect an indentured servant--in order to pay penance. As a maid, Mahoro gives her dead commander's son, Suguru, her "body and soul."<sup>90</sup> Thus, her body, which had previously belonged to the militant Vesper, becomes transferred to Suguru's possession; she is alienated from herself. Mahoro becomes a maid, which in the Japanese cultural sphere, is like the *shōjo* in that it connotes a servitude that is social, labor-related, and sexual.<sup>91</sup> As a maid, Mahoro occupies a social position which is lowly and slave-like. By becoming a maid her entrance into 'humanity', out of inhumanity (as a weapon for Vesper), is one of into a human world of sexual and gender relations which perpetually marginalizes her. She makes herself into a 'slave' out of her human feelings of guilt and regret and enters a hegemonic humanity which pushes her to the periphery. In addition to this, throughout the series Mahoro is perpetually pushed back into violence, now without the resources she had before: she is again, worse-so now, in a state of powerlessness.

In *Gunslinger Girl*, I interrogated the way in which the work utilized the logic of futurism in its construction of the cyborg economy of bodies. Futurism presents itself as an aesthetic and political position which privileges war over peace; theorizes the human body as an expendable resource in war, in which men can assert their domination over both nature and women and how the machine of war can assert its dominance over the human realm. In this way, the status of Mahoro operates in a similar manner. Mahoro serves always the status quo, in whichever role she assumes. As a woman, her body is continually broken down and objectified, both in battle and in the home. Her place in humanity is both marginal and temporary. As stated earlier, at the end of every episode

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<sup>90</sup> *Mahoromatic*. "Lady Teacher Saori, Age: Twenty-Five" Directed by Yamaga Hiroyuki. Gainax.

<sup>91</sup> Luke Sharp "Maid Meets Mammal: The 'Animalized' Body of the Cosplay Maid Character in Japan." *Intertexts* 15, no 1, 1.

there is a title card stating that “Mahoro has x days until deactivation,” the number in question decreasingly steadily from episode to episode. In the Futurist schema, there is a constant desire for progress and newness, to the destruction of things which pass out of use and become obsolete. Mahoro, in leaving Vesper as a full-time soldier, becomes obsolete, and even as a maid has an expiration date. In this way, her marginality resonates with the cyborgs of *Gunslinger Girl*.

Here I discuss the cyborg characters of *Mahoromatic*, who operate in tandem with the android, Mahoro. These cyborgs are created by Management, an illuminati-like organization which endeavors to shape the major points of human history in their favor. Though it is never explicitly stated, it can be assumed that the test subjects who are made into cyborgs are acquired in the same way that the girls in GG are: forcibly. The two cyborgs who are named in the series, “boy name” and “girl name,” are both children. They are also conditioned in a similar way, both physically and emotionally. The cyborg 370 (renamed Mahoro Ando by Mahoro, when she is “rescued” and brought into Mahoro and Suguru’s family) mentions a lack of “heart.” In episode 5, a Christmas episode, 370 notes that “Santa Claus doesn’t visit children without hearts.”<sup>92</sup> In the process of creating cyborgs out of children, Management removes their “hearts,” making them closer to machines. In this case, “heart” or *kokoro* can be understood as relating to affect or emotions: in effect, empathy and feelings are forcibly removed so that Management cyborgs can be more ruthless and effective killing machines. At the same time, this mechanization process makes the cyborgs easier to control. I will look more closely at the concept of affect and how that figures into the delineation of human and non-human in a later chapter, when I analyze the anime *Ergo Proxy*. For now, it is necessary to

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<sup>92</sup> *Mahoromatic*. “Will I catch a cold tomorrow?” Directed by Yamaga Hiroyuki. Gainax.

assert that emotion is a crucial component of being human, and to remove the capacity to experience emotion is a process of dehumanization for power.

370 is created by a management scientist, an *otaku*-like figure whose disregard for life seems to be rooted in a voyeuristic desire to collect, study, and “endlessly consume”<sup>93</sup> derivative fan works and feminine bodies. The arc of this character is as such: he deploys the cyborgs he creates to collect Mahoro, who he believes to be a scientific masterwork. He tries, and eventually fails, to capture Mahoro; however, it is the process of collecting which is significant. According to Azuma’s conception of *otaku* cultural consumption, this scientist creates for himself a database in the form of cyborgs and information regarding Mahoro. With scopophilic pleasure he accesses *moe*-elements from his collection. The bodies of the cyborgs, and by extension Mahoro, serve not only as pawns in war and violence, but as subjects of male pleasure. The *otaku*, as Azuma claims, did not arise because of economic stagnation, but rather preceded it, in the sense that the rise of *otaku* culture originated before 1990.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to make the same claim as *Gunslinger Girl*, where the Agency’s desire to control female bodies correlates to a very specific cultural and economic moment. However, connecting these two masculine concepts is this very impulse to dominate the bodies of women. As a result, I conclude that the hybrid beings of 370, Mahoro, and the cyborg girls all come into being from the patriarchal imperative to classify and control all which fall outside of power.

What is particularly interesting here is the fact that the overarching goal of Management is to keep humanity “pure.” They are against Vesper, who we find in the second season is attempting to capitulate with the aliens, after Mahoro wins a significant

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<sup>93</sup> Azuma, *Otaku*, 105

<sup>94</sup> Ibid 3

victory for humanity. Management sees this as a threat to both humanity's primacy and the purity of the human race. The work explains that the Matthew aliens is a collective consciousness; before descending upon earth, this race of aliens ascended into a state where they exist in a kind of amorphous, unlimited state. Matthew exists as a Transcendental Other, and this blurring of boundaries is what worries Management. Even though the aliens originated as a "humanoid" race, Management's conception of humanity is exclusionary and hegemonic: they are terrestrial earthlings, and therefore, all humans which originate elsewhere are non-human.

Despite this, Management deploys hybrid beings--the cyborgs--for their own ends. They create beings which blur the line between human and non-human, which is fundamentality what the alien Matthew race is. To combat this contradiction, the cyborgs are conditioned to be without heart. This preserves the divide between them and their human masters. In this way, this deadening of emotion and humanity shows that "affect" is indeed the conditional trait of human beings, and that without it, one cannot be human. In this way, in *Mahoromatic*, Posthumanity, which champions hybridity, fluidity, and the feminine, is used as a signifier of an Otherness which connotes powerlessness. Rather than being freed through the process of going "beyond the human," the hybrid beings of *Mahoromatic* are trapped in a dyad of one-way relational power. Boundaries close upon their Posthuman bodies, rather than expanding to meet them. As with Mahoro and the cyborgs, the conditions which create them also bind them into a precarious position in which they can be neither human nor a Transcendental Other.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined the ways in which two anime series, *Gunslinger Girl* and *Mahoromatic*, conceptualize the place of women in Posthumanism. In *Gunslinger Girl*, young girls are turned into Posthuman agents, yet are stripped of their

agency and mobilized for violence in the process. *Mahoromatic* attempts to return agency to the Posthuman by removing her from war, but in the process simply shifts the apparatus which places her in hierarchy. As a result, in both instances Posthuman women become implicated in a Master-Slave relationship, which serves their male-human masters by maintaining a gendered status quo at their expense. The objectification of women happens, in this way, in two stages: in the first women are valued for their bodies and physical appearance, and in the second, they are made into actual objects. These two anime works operate in a world in which the second order of objectification has been achieved. As I will show throughout this thesis, the Posthuman Master Slave Dynamic serves as lens by which to view a Posthumanity which is not “post-gender” as Donna Haraway theorized, but one in which gender becomes more significant in dictating the social and political context of bodies. In Japanese Science Fiction, gender is paramount both as a marketing technique, which serves to attract *otaku*, but also as a means of framing characters in familiar ways while the text presents a fantastic vision of the future and human potential. Human potential, as I show, translated to “Male” potential built upon the labor of subjugated women.

The cyborgs of *Gunslinger Girl* and the androids/cyborgs of *Mahoromatic* are slaves because they are trapped within various and concentric systems of bio-power from which there is no egress. Their bodies are re-made in the futurist ideal of human subject: something which goes beyond the human but can be controlled by apparatuses of power. In the case of *Gunslinger Girl*, the agency, which is a proxy of the power of the fascist Italian government; in *Mahoromatic*, it moves from Vesper to Suguru. These Posthumans are women so that the apparatuses can enact war and violence, while at the same time consolidate control of women's bodies and existences. As I have stated before and will continue to assert throughout this project, the desire to create weapons from women's bodies and to create women from weapons arrives from a societal feeling

of lessened masculinity, brought on by economic stagnation and destabilized gender roles. In so-called “Lost Decade” Japan, this desire congeals with the *otaku* model of cultural consumption to produce the demand for violent, yet controllable women.

In conclusion, Posthumanism in these two works is deployed not as a means of eroding gender hierarchy, but as a solution to military labor and rampant feelings of emasculation. The logic therein is to make girls into cyborg or android slaves so that those in power may enact warlike violence with impunity, and at the same time, are able to put women into positions of subservience to men: through the language of the master and naming, their bodies, their thoughts, and the very modes of their existence. In the final chapter of this thesis I will take this same critical lens to the anime series *Chobits*, to examine the Posthuman Master Slave Dynamic outside of the framing of war and violence: when subservience becomes domestic, and romantic desire becomes instrumentalized for the justification of hierarchy.



## CHAPTER 3

### **CHOBITS AND THE SEXUALIZED MECHANICAL BODY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this thesis I have presented the sequencing of ideas as a thematic progression. The first chapter established the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic, with the second exploring its implications in both gender politics and the aesthetics of fascism. This final chapter will focus upon the Master Slave-Dynamic and the sexual body as the culmination of this trajectory. In this chapter, I focus on the anime series *Chobits* (2002) and its depiction of the gendered relationship between female androids and male humans. While previous scholars, such as Thomas Lamarre in his work *The Anime Machine*, have relied upon on a psychoanalytic model in analyzing this text, I take a separate approach, focusing instead on the gender politics of the sexualized body within the framework of posthumanism.<sup>95</sup> This is to say, I will conduct an analysis of the female posthuman body as a site of male sexual (and romantic) desire. Moving from the previous chapter in which war and violence are the lived realities of female androids and cyborgs, this chapter attends to *Chobits*, which exists in a war-less “utopia.” The purpose of this analysis will be to explore both societal and material relations in a society outside of violence. And yet, as Seaman contended in relation to *Murder in Balloon Town*, this utopia hides within its systems of gendered division and patriarchal control which push it towards being more dystopic than not.

In my analysis of *Chobits*, I will look at the relationships between humans and androids and the representations of female posthuman bodies. I will show how the

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<sup>95</sup> I diverge from Lamarre in other ways as well in this study. I find that anime, while a visual and technologically mediated, should not and cannot be separated from the history and culture which produces it, even if these are more globally than nationally grounded.

bodies of female androids are othered and made into objects to be both used and thrown away by humans. In other words, these posthumans, specially the character Chi, are treated as abject beings. To this end I will employ the language of Kristeva, if not to strengthen the central argument of this thesis: that the relations between humans and non-humans replicate “real world” hierarchies of gender. Androids in *Chobits* are not androgynous, but rather, they are coded female and expressed labeled as such. Human-android relations thus replicate patriarchy.

The posthuman master slave relationship in *Chobits* works to keep Androids trapped within a heterosexual matrix of male desire. This desire binds them to a hegemonic model of social relations in which they are always already subalterns. In this case, I also contend with the more positive conclusions that Lamarre leads into the work. The androids in *Chobits* do not explore the boundaries of humanity, but rather outline its edge. They make visible the lattices of power and gender hierarchy upon which human society is structured. Their function--and more broadly--the function of posthuman bodies in human society is to form a class without class-consciousness: a mindless cohort that allows for humanity's darker dreams of totalitarian and patriarchal rule to play out. These dreams arise, as I argue, from a specific historical and cultural moment: early 2000s Japan. It is here, in this chapter, that I will lay bare this logic of domination resulting from both economic anxiety, fears of the erasure of traditional gender roles, and social precarity.

I will now give some brief bibliographic information about the work, following a plot summary. The anime *Chobits* is an animated adaptation of a manga written by the all-women manga writing team CLAMP.<sup>96</sup> The manga ran from 2000 to 2002 for eight volumes and was published by Kodansha in *Young Magazine*. The year the manga

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<sup>96</sup> CLAMP is an interesting manga studio in that, not only are all four members of its women, but also their works all share a collective universe.

concluded, 2002, was the year in which the anime was subsequently broadcast, running from April 2<sup>nd</sup> to September 24<sup>th</sup> for twenty-six episodes. It was directed by Asaka Morio, produced by Ono Tatsuya, Sekido Yuichi, and Gensho Tetsuo, and published by Madhouse Inc. Interestingly enough, Asaka Morio also directed the *Gunslinger Girl* anime and Madhouse Inc. was the studio which published it. And while this thesis is unable to trace the linkages between these series on a directorial level, it is at least thematically coherent to have this chapter on *Chobits* follow the chapter on *Gunslinger Girl*.

The anime itself takes place in a near-future Japan in which computers as we know them are instead replaced with human-shaped computer androids, known as Persocom. Like desktop or laptop computers, they are bought in stores. Some specialty users create their own Personcom from custom designs, but the majority of Personcoms are purchased. The story of the anime, adapted directly from the manga, follows Motсуwa Hideki, a young man from the countryside who has moved to Tokyo to study in order to retake the college entrance exams (called being a *rōnin*<sup>97</sup>). One day he happens upon a Persocom<sup>98</sup> lying abandoned in the road. He takes her home, turns her on, and names her “Chi,” after the only sound she is seemingly able to make. This meeting marks the beginning of the two main plot threads of the anime. One involves the developing relationship between Chi and Hideki in which Hideki teaches Chi how to speak and operate in the world. Eventually their platonic relationship turns romantic, following the trope of this kind of romantic-comedy narrative.

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<sup>97</sup> This term *rōnin* 浪人 refers to an individual, such as Hideki, who has failed to pass their college entrance exams and must “wander” for another year and study. Oftentimes, such as in Hideki’s case, these people will enter a cram school, or *juku*, in order to shore up their independent studies.

<sup>98</sup> “Persocom” is a pun on the Japanese word *pasocom*, which means “personal computer”—PC. The pun works out to mean something like “Person Computer.”

The other plotline unravels slowly throughout the 25-episode anime, which involves the nature of Chi's origins: who or what she really is, who made her, and what is her purpose. It is discovered by the end of the series that Chi was one of two "*Chobits*" class Persocoms, made with the ability to learn and think; essentially, the *Chobits* are created with human-like intelligence built into their hardware. These *Chobits*, Freya and Elda, were created by a husband/wife team of roboticists in order to synthesize life, or more generally, to create a mechanical human being. One of the *Chobits*, Elda, falls in love with her father to the despair of the human couple. The male roboticist, however, cannot reciprocate this romantic love, which causes Elda much grief. In order to save her from heartbreak, Freya merges her consciousness with Elda so that she would not feel lonely. The female roboticist, China (who ends up posing as Hideki's landlord in the series) wipes Freya's memory so that she can start a new life. Through a dramatic and disorienting conclusion, Chi becomes aware of her true nature (of being Freya, or more appropriately, a hybrid of Freya and Elda) and, with Hideki's aid, unlocks a secret component of her programming: the ability to imbue all Persocoms in the world with human-like emotions. The series ends with Chi and Hideki's relationship presumably leading into a long-term romance, with the fate of the now irrevocably-changed world left ambiguous.

### **3.2 Personcoms in Society**

*Chobits* is set in a world in which android-technology has become commonplace, at least in metropolitan areas. When Hideki walks the city of Tokyo, he sees Personcoms everywhere he goes. Not only that, but he witnesses the interaction of humans and Personcoms. In his life before coming to Tokyo, he worked as a farmer,

which the opening scene of the first episode establishes.<sup>99</sup> When he comes to the city, he is bombarded by not only the proliferation of these advanced technologies, but also by how pedestrian they are: seemingly everyone he comes across has a Personcom in some way or another. Hideki's country background enforces this sort of "fish out of water" narrative. This, however, is not to imply that Personcom technology is accessible to all. Making his way from the bus stop to find his apartment, he stops by a store window displaying Personcoms for sale. He remarks upon how expensive<sup>100</sup> they are, especially for a *rōnin* who as of yet has no job. Persocoms, although ubiquitous in cosmopolitan society, are really only available to middle- or upper-class people. *Chobits* seemingly takes place within an alternate earth which has these advanced technologies, and yet, has not followed the same historical trajectory as Japan. For instance, the bubble seemingly never burst, and the middle class remained strong. This utopian vision of Japan seems to be an optimistic imagining of the possibilities that technology has to change society. Considering how in the 2000s the robotics industry flourished while the rest of the Japanese economy languished, *Chobits* works almost like a fantasy fulfillment: that society will progress towards a brighter future, with androids and advanced technologies paving the way.

But what of these Persocoms? I will engage with a visual analysis of the character Chi later in this chapter, but first I would like to linger upon the Personcom as both a product of society and as posthuman beings *inhabiting* society. It is important to understand the body of the Persocom beyond Chi, for the issues of gendered abjection and hierarchy extend reach all parts of *Chobits* society. As a rule, the world of *Chobits* is

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<sup>99</sup> *Chobits*, "Chi Awakens." Directed by Asaka Morio. Produced by Ono Tatsuya, Sekido Yuichi, Gensho Tetsuo. Animax, April 2, 2002.

<sup>100</sup> A sign in the window says a Personcom costs about 598,000 yen, which in modern US dollars would be nearly \$6,000, not accounting for inflation.

structured around a conception of gendered posthuman bodies. For instance, every Persocom that appears in the show is female. Throughout the series, nearly every Persocom in both the foreground and background is gendered as a woman, including those seen to be working in service positions at stores and restaurants. The one exception is the Persocom “Zima,” who appears near the end of the series in order to thwart Chi’s self-actualization. In this case even, Zima is purposed towards a single end, and fails. It is telling that Zima, a Persocom, is made to be a sort of “database-cop” to regulate other Persocom; a member of a marginalized people is used to police other marginalized individuals. This character is very interesting, and more study should be done to understand the connection here between *Chobits* and coloniality, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, besides this single example, the world of *Chobits* is one in which the advance of technology has led to the explicit gendered of technology as well. In this sense, the creators and consumers of Personcoms are unable to conceive of this technology as not being explicated feminine with its users primarily—though not exclusively—male.

With this concept in check—that Persocoms are virtually mono-gender—I would also like to describe their functions. As I have noted earlier in this chapter, Personcoms function essentially like walking computers. One is able to ask them a question, as if typing a Google search, or perform some kind of task, such as watching pornography, and to the limits of their programming they can do so. For Hideki specifically, the prospect of having a computer with which to search for pornography is very appealing, a matter to which I will return later. A modern analogue to this technology is Siri, which is Apple’s virtual assistant. Personcoms are “Siri’s” given physical form.

Personcoms also have some measure of personality, as well as varying form factors. Shinbo’s Personcom Sumono, for instance, is a pocket-size Persocom and serves as a frequent source of comic relief. She is energetic and talkative, speaking in a

very high, nasally register. Her physical appearance, both in term of her features and statute, are meant to evoke a sense of *moe*, which I explored in the previous chapter. Her voice, as well, evokes a sense of hegemonic femininity to which female workers in the Japanese service industry are often made to acquiesce to. Sumono, however, functions entirely as a tool. Throughout the series, she is seen as popping out of Shinbo's pocket, as if she were inert beforehand. She exists only to act as his terminal interface to the internet. She has no desires or wishes; her only actions in the world are a result of her programmatic functions. She is a machine in the world of *Chobits* in that she has a purely pragmatic function. It is important, therefore, to understand the role that Personcoms play within society: as gendered terminals, whose shapes and roles vary to some degree, although are universally employed to service humans.

### 3.3 Abject Androids

Now that I have established what Personcoms are and what they do, I will now do a close reading of a particular scene in the first episode of *Chobits*. Through this, I will attend to the specific *animeic* elements which produce the conditions of the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic. Doing so will also allow me to engage with a close thematic reading of the more insidious role Personcoms have in *Chobits* society.

In the first episode of the series Hideki moves to Tokyo from the countryside to study for his college entrance exams. One night, coming home from his cram school, he walks by the side of a house to discover a human figure laying on top of a pile of trash. This figure is the character Chi. The arc of these two characters is as follows: as Chi learns more skills, Hideki and Chi begin a relationship which alternates between paternal and romantic. There are times when Hideki seems to guide Chi through human society like a father-figure, and other times when there is sexual tension between them. Their relationship is an uncomfortable mix of these two opposing dynamics, and over the

course of this chapter I will interrogate it. However, the process of Hideki bringing Chi home and life is significant, and I will dwell upon this.

The establishing shot in this scene is of Hideki walking home from cram school (with a convenience store bag in his hand) along a dark, lonely road. When he walks by the trash bags, the camera is static, with Chi on the righthand side, slightly out of focus. The camera lingers on this shot for a moment, although Hideki does not register what he sees right away. Comically, Hideki runs away and exclaims "Is this a dead body?!" However, after a moment he calms down, because he notices that the figure has two electronic-looking appendages on her head instead of ears. This then denotes to Hideki that this figure is a Persocom, not a human.

Chi's body is covered in thin pieces of white cloth, which barely cover her body. She lies motionless, which is why Hideki mistook her for a corpse, lying in the garbage. The effect of the composition of this scene, and of Chi's location and physical appearance, is to create a specific image of this character. Chi is "dead," but she is also "trash." Not only this, but the specific arrangement of the bandages on her body are sexually suggestive. Chi is a dead, trash, and a sexualized body. The symbols of the corpse and of refuse recall the work of Kristeva, which I have employed throughout this thesis. Both of these objects are the parts of the world humans want to "put at a distance." They are repulsive and remind us of not only our mortality, but of the rot we bring into the world and the rot we will leave behind. Chi, in being lifelessly set in the garbage, is in this scene coded as an abject body. From the outset, the space which Chi emerges from and the body which she occupies are both coded to be repugnant and undesirable; she is something to be "thrust aside" and reviled, just like vomit, blood, corpses, and all of human refuse. What is crucial to understand, then, is that Chi is made abject for the human-subject and via the human gaze. This is to say, within the model of



human vs. non-human, self vs. other, and abject vs. non-abject, Chi is repulsive to humans specifically: as a non-human, other, and an abjected being.

A number of theoretical intersections emerge in this moment. In being both an abject and posthuman body, Chi is able to be read in several different ways. In posthumanism, for instance, the figure of the cyborg and android seek to dissolve binary oppositions: the borders between human and non-human, subject and object, inside and out, etc. When Hideki sees Chi for the first time, what tips him off that she is not a human is her ears. Shown in figure x, Chi has mechanical ears bordering her head. These kinds of appendages are a feature of all Personcoms and are used for various purposes. Most commonly, they store wires and input jacks, so that Personcoms can interface with both terminals and other Personcoms. More importantly, however, these “ears” serve to demarcate, to a certain degree, the difference between humans and non-humans on a visual level. Most of the time these devices are easily recognizable, and most Personcoms can be visually distinguished instantaneously. However, in this scene, Hideki is given pause. He does not see her ears, and because she is lying inert, he thinks she is a (dead) human. One could say that Hideki at this moment begins to realize Chi’s transgressive identity, for it is not immediately clear to him that she is not a human. Her posthumanity is abject as it calls into question the clean distinctions between what is human and what is not, or more specifically, what falls outside of Human. The horror of this moment, then, is in Chi being both trash and in her momentarily rupturing the divide between human and non-human.



Figure 8: Chi (right) in the trash.

There is another observation to be made, specifically regarding the nature of Chi's ears. They are ovular in shape, with two contrasting colors: one on the top outside, being an off-white color, and the other a pinkish color on the outside and bottom. Then, if we return to the opening scene of this episode in which Hideki is outside in a field, we see they he is standing near a cow. This cow's ears, in both shape and coloration, align quite closely to Chi's ears. In other words, Chi's ears recall similar appendages on that of an animal. As I noted in the introduction of this thesis, the posthuman in its abject status comes close to the realm of the animal, in that is it both feared by and opposed by humans. Posthuman bodies—in this case, specifically Chi's body—is coded as abject in that it is both mechanical and animal. This supports my reading that Chi is visually demarked as other, and that Personcoms as a whole are meant to be understood as inhabiting a lower bracket of society than humans. In being non-human and animal, Personcoms are othered and can only be conceived of as laborers or sexual/romantic partners, rather than as independent subjects.



Figure 9: Chi's "ears." Notice the shape and coloration.



Figure 10: The Cow, whose ears resemble Chi's.

Instead of dwelling upon the horror of such a body, or running home in fear, Hideki lingers a moment and then decides to take Chi home. The end of this scene shows Hideki carrying the body of Chi to his small apartment, comically struggling with her dead weight. By doing this, I argue that Hideki performs a highly symbolic act. In moving her from the trash, Hideki brings Chi from the space of abjection to the space of

the home (or in Japanese *ie*, or *uchi*<sup>101</sup>). She is taken from “without” to “within.” Two things are happening here. On the one hand, bringing Chi into the home is an act of making Chi no longer “uncanny.” Sigmund Freud, writing on the uncanny, makes the connection between “uncanny” and the German word *unheimlich*, meaning “a sense of not being at home.” That which is uncanny is creepy and makes us feel as if we are outside of our comfort zone. Confronting the uncanny is like confronting something which seems like it should fit into a place but does not: it instead warps the real and makes that which is familiar feel unfamiliar. This is not unlike an encounter with the abject, in that they both gesture towards the boundaries of the normal and outline the shape of things which humans find difficult to deal with and contain. Hideki, when he brings Chi home, takes her from the uncanny space (outside of the home, the *unheimlich*) and into a “canny” space (inside). At the same time, he brings her from a place of abjection to a place of “non-abjection.” We can thus equate the uncanny, the outside, and the abject, opposed by the canny, inside, and not-abject: normality, so to speak. Upon first consideration, we might be tempted to see this as an act of total “de-abjectionification.” However, as I will make clear, this is not so. Chi, and the entirety of the Persocom class, is perpetually abjected and made into subalterns. Through physical marking and how they are treated as a source of labor and sexual investment, Chi and all Personcoms are codified as bodies which exist for the service of the patriarchal order.

When Chi is finally brought home, Hideki runs into an issue: he does not know how to turn her on. He then begins to search every space on her body in order to find an “on-switch.” This leads to moments of sexually charged comedy, as Hideki (a virgin) has never been so intimate with a woman’s body. His nose bleeds, which in the visual

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<sup>101</sup> The character 家, pronounceable as *ie* or *uchi*, means home explicitly, but also can mean “one’s family.” Additionally, the word *uchi* can mean “within.” Therefore, the act of bringing Chi to Hideki’s home can be seen as an act of bringing her into his inner circle, or family, as well as to an inside space: his heart and mind (*kokoro*), or simply into the basic fabric of his being.

language of anime indicates acute sexual arousal. He fondles her breasts and buttocks, desperately searching for a switch. To a certain extent, were Chi not a machine merely awaiting to be “turned on,” this scene would take on a much darker tone. The scene is played for laughs, and while the text does not treat this scene as an act of assault on Chi’s body, it is difficult to read it as entirely innocent, especially in a post “me-too” era. Hideki’s blatant disregard for Chi’s space, both around and within her body, betrays, I believe, a kind of attitude that Hideki holds towards women’s’ bodies: that they are sites of male erotic desire which men may explore and plunder as they will.

This brings up an important aspect of *Chobits*: its foregrounding of the body—specifically, the sexual body. Another sub-type of Japanese media which does a similar thing is animated pornography, in which in Japanese is called *hentai*.<sup>102</sup> Susan Napier, in a chapter in her book *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, discusses several pornographic anime. Although *Chobits* is not explicitly a *hentai* (although it is indeed explicit) Napier’s insights are useful. This is because, as I have stated, *Chobits* deals with the body as it is sexualized through the heterosexual male gaze. *Chobits*, like *hentai*, “brings up questions...such as the relation of gender, power, and control to technology, tradition, and transition.” It “brings the body to the fore”<sup>103</sup> in a way which makes thinking of the ways in which the show deals with sexuality very productive. Through looking at several *hentai* shows and films, and how female bodies are made terrifying and abject, while generally falling back into patriarchal gender norms, Napier concludes that:

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<sup>102</sup> *Hentai* is written with the characters 変態. The word can also be used metonymically to describe a perverted person.

<sup>103</sup> Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, “The Body in Pornographic Anime,” 64.

it may well be that depiction of gender relations in their most basic form accentuate a still-active nostalgia for an earlier, more understandable period in which male and female roles were more firmly fixed...offering its male viewers visions of fantasy identities integrally linked to a lost traditional culture.<sup>104</sup>

In this way, *hentai* uses female bodies in order to re-assert patriarchal values and male desires: to control women and use them as they please. Although there are moments of empowering transformation, these works often fail to remain empowering.

This relates to *Chobits* in that, when Hideki is exploring Chi's body, he reveals the degree to which the female body is set within a relation of power to men which upholds patriarchy. Chi is trash and abject: within this mental framework, there is just as much wrong with perusing her body as there is digging through the garbage. Again, this is not something which the text explores as morally deficient, or as particularly important to Chi or Hideki's character development. However, the fact that Chi's feminine, posthuman body is brought from the uncanny-outside to the canny-inside—and into Hideki's *ie* system—shows that her body is simply an object to be manipulated. The Personcom body is forever a subaltern and cannot fulfill the “destiny” of posthumanism's destruction of boundaries, for it is designed to always uphold them. This is made clearer when Hideki turns Chi on.

Through trial and tribulation, Hideki is finally able to turn Chi on. After fumbling around her body, he determines that the only place he has not yet groped is her genitalia. Though he hesitates for a moment, he eventually places his hand down there and finds some kind of switch (the audience, of course, does not see where his hands go because *Chobits* was aired on nationwide Japanese television). When he pushes her on-button (presumed to be her clitoris, although this is impossible to know), she spurts to life in a flash of light. Chi takes the center of the frame and lifts into the air as her white

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<sup>104</sup> Napier, *Anime*, 83

bandages fly around the room. The main musical theme of the series plays in this moment, underscoring the emotional moment: this is when Chi and Hideki truly meet for the first time. This scene could also be read as an orgasm, with Chi flooding into existence through Hideki pleasuring her clitoris. The sexual connotations are impossible to ignore in this scene. Taking into consideration what Napier writes about sex and power, the orgasm that Hideki gives Chi can be seen as both a generative moment, in which Hideki creates Chi, but also as him possessing her body. He gives her pleasure at the same moment he gives her life, marking her as his.

In effect, Chi comes to life as a result of Hideki's desire for a Persocom. This act resembles the Greek myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, in which a sculpture falls in love with one of his creations, to which the goddess of love Aphrodite responds by making it into a living person. Pygmalion creates Galatea, and when she is made flesh, becomes both her father and her lover. In *Chobits*, through switching her on Hideki creates her in a similar way. This father-lover and daughter-lover paradigm is developed over the course of the show, though at no point does the text engage with the incestual nature of it. Hideki is a lovelorn Pygmalion figure, who finds and creates his Galatea, all for the sake of romance. I argue, again, that this mixing of father and lover imbricates Chi within an impenetrable matrix of male desire. Her birth is facilitated through the figure who ultimately comes to be her romantic partner, and she is never given leave to exist outside of this framework.

This issue of sex and touching is made more interesting considering a later episode, titled *Chi Works*. During the episode, Chi begins to explore her body, which causes a voice within Chi to speak up, saying: "Remember this well. You rebooted by hitting a switch deep in there."<sup>105</sup> The voice discourages Chi from touching inside her

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<sup>105</sup> *Chobits*, "Chi Works." Directed by Asaka Morio. Produced by Ono Tatsuya, Sekido Yuichi, Gensho Tetsuo. Animax, May 14, 2002.

vagina, which according to it would cause her memories to wipe, in much the same way that happened prior to the events of the anime. What this implies for both Hideki and Chi's relationship, however, is that they will never be able to have vaginal intercourse. Though their relationship progresses rapidly, and by the series end they have become intimate, they will never have a typical sexual relationship—for if they did, Chi as she exists now would disappear. By all accounts, Chi appears to be the only Personcom with this particular function; most other human-sized Personcoms are able to have vaginal sex. One could consider this to be a form of protection: were Chi ever to be sexually assaulted, she would simply reset. However, it also functions to keep Chi within a childlike, pre-sexual state, much like the cyborgs of *Gunslinger Girl*. Being pre-sexual, Chi exists within the liminal state between adulthood and early childhood, and as such, is subject to the power of those around her. In this case, although Hideki will never be able to have sex with her, he still controls Chi in a paternalistic manner.

When Chi awakens, there is immediately a problem of communication. Chi is unable to speak anything more than a single syllable: *chi*. Thus, through a comedy of errors, Hideki sees fit to give her a name and calls her "Chi." This is a process we have seen in both *Gunslinger Girl* and *Mahoromatic*. Hideki names Chi, and in the process of doing so, owns her. He makes her both his pet and property, such like the cyborgs in the anime this thesis has already attended to. This is also a major point of character development for Chi, because this begins her process of learning (or re-learning) language. As Chi naturalizes in the world more and more, she gradually learns to speak through interacting with Hideki. He teaches her words, and she parrots them back to him. Her lack of skill is often played for laughs, but over time she does become more competent in speaking. This dynamic between the two of them presents an interesting question involving language. Hideki creates Chi, and then proceeds to guide her way through the world with language—his language. Hideki instrumentalizes the language of



the man and the master in order to breathe life into her, and control her; from here on out, Chi speaks in his tongue. The language which Chi acquires over the course of the series is the language of her Master and Father. An entry point to better understand what happens here is through the concept of phallogocentrism.

This concept, introduced by the critical theorist Jacques Derrida in the essay “Plato’s Pharmacy,” deals with the ways in which language is structured in a gendered way. Phallogocentrism, a portmanteau of “phallocentrism” and “logocentrism” says that meaning is created through language, and that this language often takes the phallus, or the patriarchy, as the foundation of logic and meaning. Society functions through upholding the phallus as the core of meaning.<sup>106</sup> In this way, the word of the father creates *logos* or logic. Hideki guides Chi through the world with language—his language—which is the word of the Father, as I have positioned him. As a result of this, he wields incredible power over her. He shapes her entire worldview and is critical in her own understandings of meaning. One could say that meaning itself falls under Hideki’s power. In this way, Hideki is her master and she his slave, all within the framework of the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic.

The name that Hideki gives her, “Chi.” itself carries several symbolic implications. Although in the show it is seen written as ちい *chi-i*, *chi* with only one “i” hosts a variety of meanings. *Chi* can be written with the character 血 (*chi*), which means blood.

Therefore, one reading of this could be that Hideki names the android he finds in the trash “blood.” Blood, as I have indicated earlier, connotes a sense of the abject: it reminds us of death, corpses, and bodily harm. As such, to name someone blood, or *chi*, is to code them with this sense of the abject, but also, to foreground aspects of her

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<sup>106</sup> Dino Franco Felluga, *Critical Theory: The Key Concepts* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2015), 217.

femininity which are abject in a male sense. This is to say, the blood of menstruation and childbirth is both integral to the (cis) female experience, but also a symbol of the abject to be weaponized by patriarchy. In other words, women are made abject because they produce blood, and Chi being given this name brings this reality to mind. It is, in a way, ironic that Chi has this name because she is unable to reproduce, being a mechanical being. This irony though, makes it clear that even posthuman bodies, although they might dream of being “post-gender” in the Haraway sense, are formed in a sign-system which cannot help but both gender and Other them. In the case of Chi, this fortifies by argument that she is produced by an environment which denies her subjecthood and makes her a slave.

### **3.4 Personcoms and Women in Society: Yuzuki and Minoru**

In this section, I will be moving beyond the specific relationship between Chi and Hideki in order to more broadly attend to Personcoms within the society of *Chobits*. The Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic can be seen in several different relationships between humans and Personcoms, and as such, it would be inappropriate to ignore them. The first relationship outside of Chi and Hideki I would like to explore is between the characters Minoru and Yuzuki. In the course of the show, Minoru, who is a young boy genius, becomes friends with Hideki. Yuzuki is *one of* Minoru’s Personcoms and figures quite prominently in the plot. It is important to note that the dynamic between Minoru and Yuzuki is very complex; as such for the sake of brevity, this study is unable to examine too deeply the contours of their particular relationship. However, there are aspects of it which align with the aims of his chapter and the greater logic of this thesis project, and so, I will explicate them here.

The posthuman master slave dynamic between Minoru and Yuzuki manifests itself as a relationship between a master and his maid, for Yuzuki is throughout the show

animated with a maid's costume. We find here connection with *Mahoromatic*: the maid as a symbol of both power and of *moe* for male consumers of media. However, in *Mahoromatic*, Mahoro moves in the world of her own accord, albeit into and within the boundaries of oppressive systems. Yuzuki the Persocom, while also an android, does not move through the world freely. She only occupies the space around Minoru. She is his maid and has no way of existing or operating in the world outside of this framework. The anime shows this by not ever having Yuzuki leaving Minoru's side. However, a wrinkle is introduced in a later episode, in which Minoru must leave his mansion without Yuzuki in order to help Hideki. In this case, Yuzuki stays in the home while Minoru leaves. Their linkage is momentarily broken. However, what this does instead is reinforce a geography of gender. Women are bound to the home and internal spaces, whereas the male is able occupy external spaces outside the home. In this particular case, the geography of gender is stronger even than the servitude demanded by traditional gender norms. However, it still underscores the gendered and hierarchical dynamic which exists between these two characters. To reiterate the overarching thesis of this project, I argue that by examining this pair, we come to see that Human-Personcom relations are designed to mirror traditional Japanese gender dynamics.

The creation of Yuzuki by Minoru in of itself is a significant aspect of their particular Master-Slave Dynamic. Minoru, as I have described, is a Persocom genius. He has both a complete technical understanding of how Persocoms operate and their cultural significance, but also a preternatural mastery of their mechanics. Minoru created Yuzuki himself, as a child. He did so, however, out of grief for his older sister who tragically died of illness. Minoru created Yuzuki from the image of his dead sister, compiling both her appearance and personality from his memories of her. The audience is given hints to this fact at the end of episode 10, with the confirmation coming later on, in episode 21.

From unbearable grief, Minoru created an artificial facsimile of his sibling. However, when she is finally complete, Minoru becomes dismayed, because he realized that his creation cannot replace his sister: she is a constructed being made from echoes and dead memories. He realizes that there is some essential difference between his “real” sister and the Yuzuki Persocom. This moment brings to mind two similar examples across literature and media. The horror of the moment resembles the horror of Victor Frankenstein (from the eponymous Victorian novel) upon bringing to life his creation. The horror that one has brought to life something whose existence fundamentally troubles their own is the same. Again, this recalls a sense of the abject and uncanny. A similar thing happens in the anime *Astro Boy*. As I mentioned in the introduction, Dr. Tenma creates Astro Boy, but is horrified when he realizes that he cannot replace his son. Yuzuki, Frankenstein’s Monster, and Astro Boy are all uncanny and abject beings, for they thrust to the forefront of consciousness the knowledge that the difference between them and their creators is gelatinous. They are horrific because they imply the artificiality of their creators and of humans altogether.

In an emotional conclusion, Minoru, at the very end of the series, reconciles with Yuzuki after fearing and reviling her quietly for so long. She explains to him that she cannot be his sister, nor can she be human, but she can neither be entirely machine.<sup>107</sup> She explains that, if Minoru allows it, she can occupy a third space, outside the human and machine: the posthuman. She also, however, is still his maid: this aspect does not change, nor does the show ever attempt to deal with her position as both servant and sister-simulacra. As such, her entrance into posthuman identity is facilitated primarily through Minoru: through the Master and the Father. Therefore, to call this a moment of transcendence would be to ignore the gender politics at play.

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<sup>107</sup> *Chobits*, “Chi Answers.” Directed by Asaka Morio. Produced by Ono Tatsuya, Sekido Yuichi, Gensho Tetsuo. Animax, September 3, 2002.

Here we can see that posthuman beings in *Chobits* fall into a particular framework. They are instrumentalized to fix the family and fill in the gaps within human society. The condition of their existence is that they are assemblages of artificial memories and pre-programmed personalities. These attributes—their artificiality—are foregrounded through physical markers (i.e. ears), which set them immediately outside the sphere of the human. Therefore, they are coded as both abject and feminine; they are beings which are designed to be demarcated as both Other and woman, and yet, are utilized to certain uphold social and familial values. These posthuman bodies are thus caught in a contentious space. There is a tension between desiring their bodies—both sexually, and as panacea to the breakdown of the family—and a repulsion towards them and the things they produce which come into conflict with the patriarchal matrix.

My goal in saying this is to make clear one simple aspect of *Chobits*: that these relationships are underscored by gender. Even within these works, however, tensions arise between the dominant social order (a world in which Persocoms and Persocom labor is normalized) and previous paradigms of social relations. *Chobits*, in various instances, highlights a particular social anxiety: that romantic and sexual liaisons between humans and Persocoms will come to eclipse “natural” human relationships. In the second episode of the anime, after Hideki and Chi meet with Minoru to discuss the nature of Chi’s mysterious programming, Minoru pulls Hideki aside and warns him that “Even if she learns...no matter...its best if you don’t fall in love. You don’t want to cry later.”<sup>108</sup> Here, Minoru is speaking from experience. When he created the Persocom Yuzuki out of the memories and physical data of the Human Persocom, he was left in horror at the uncanny division between humans and machines. Therefore, he warns Hideki here so that he does not attempt the same project: to love a machine. In the next

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<sup>108</sup> *Chobits*, “Chi Goes Out.” Directed by Asaka Morio. Produced by Ono Tatsuya, Sekido Yuichi, Gensho Tetsuo. Animax, April 9, 2002.

section, I will explore an example from the show which deals with this fear of social breakdown.

### 3.5 Personcoms and Women in Society: Yumi and Ueda

*Chobits* features another interesting set of characters which illustrate the complexity of the show's assessment of gender and gendered issues. Yumi is a young woman who works alongside Hideki at a local pub, and Ueda is the owner of a patisserie nearby which Chi works at later in the series. In episode 11 the two of them see each other while Hideki and Yumi are out on a date. Yumi begins to appear visibly distressed and runs away, leading Hideki to wonder if they have a previous history together. It is eventually made clear that, prior to the beginning of the anime, Yumi worked for Ueda at his bakery, and that romantic feelings had grown between the two of them. However, one day Yumi came to learn a feature of Ueda's past: that years ago he had been married to a Persocom. The two of them had been happily married until, she was struck by a car in the street. This caused her to malfunction and slowly lose her memory, until he eventually had to deactivate her.<sup>109</sup> When Yumi learns this piece of Ueda's past, she is repulsed and runs away (only to reconsider her position later in the series when they meet again and renew their romantic tryst).<sup>110</sup> What is interesting here is Yumi's disgust over Ueda's previous marriage to a Personcom. In Episode 18, she says to Hideki that "some people think Personcoms are better than humans...and that they'll ignore humans."<sup>111</sup> This "some people" is clearly her, with her private comments betraying an

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<sup>109</sup> *Chobits*, "Chi Waits." Directed by Asaka Morio. Produced by Ono Tatsuya, Sekido Yuichi, Gensho Tetsuo. Animax, August 20, 2002.

<sup>110</sup> *Chobits*, "Chi Wears and Takes Off." Directed by Asaka Morio. Produced by Ono Tatsuya, Sekido Yuichi, Gensho Tetsuo. Animax, September 20, 2002.

<sup>111</sup> *Chobits*, "Chi Disappears." Directed by Asaka Morio. Produced by Ono Tatsuya, Sekido Yuichi, Gensho Tetsuo. Animax, August 13, 2002.

anxiety over Personcoms in society. I argue that in fearing Ueda's previous relationship with a Personcom, Yumi signals a concern that humans are not only becoming closer to living in harmony with machines, but that human-Personcom romance could become more normalized. In a sense, she is worried about the breakdown of traditional romantic relations between humans, to be replaced by human-Personcom romance. I will now introduce another set of characters in order to further develop this point.

One of the central dramas of *Chobits* is between the character Shinbo (Hideki's friend and neighbor) and their cram school (*juku*) teacher, Shimizu. In episode 14, Hideki finds the two of them kissing under a streetlight in the rain, which brings to light a secret romance the audience had not yet known about. We learn that Shimizu is currently married but left her husband to be with Shinbo. The reason she did this was that her husband, after purchasing a Persocom for the home, came to obsess over it, to the point where he completely shut himself off from his wife. One night, Shimizu came home to find the door locked, and no matter how much she called out to her husband, he ignored her to simply stare at his Persocom, who he had come to love more dearly than his wife. Shimizu, similar to Yumi, develops negative feelings towards Persocoms. One night she is spending time with Hideki and, during a conversation about Personcoms, asks him "Is it more fun to be with a Personcom than a human?"<sup>112</sup> From her own experience, she believes this to be true.

In both of these cases, a similar trend can be seen: that Persocoms, while created by humans for human use, have a quality to them which makes them at times more desirable than other humans. This is to say, that they are obedient. It should be noted again, however, that every Persocom is a woman, and that every person who falls in love with them is a man. Therefore, the fear which *Chobits* works through is that

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<sup>112</sup> *Chobits*, "Chi Entertains." Directed by Asaka Morio. Produced by Ono Tatsuya, Sekido Yuichi, Gensho Tetsuo. Animax, July 9, 2002.

android women will make human women obsolete. This is because they are bodies designed by men as vessels for masculine desire; they are perfectly crafted to be both cute and sexually attractive and their masters to be both Father and lover. Persocoms are thus androids that are meant to be fallen in love with. This paradigm shift, from human-human love to human-Persocom love, simply replicates traditional gender dynamics. Women, in the patriarchal schema, are objectified in order to keep them within power. Their material bodies are the sites of domination. The same is true of Persocoms. This anxiety over changing human-object relations is an anxiety over what happens to women when they shift from being the subjects of patriarchal control. *Chobits* does not posit what the outcome of this is; The result of posthuman romance is left ambiguous. However, it cannot be overstated that it is human-women who fear these android women. This recalls the epigram of this thesis: the fear at how “frighteningly inert” humans are. The fear of machine-lover however is simply another manifestation of the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic, for it 1. seeks to perpetuate a boundary between humans and posthumans and 2. denotes a hierarchy of love, with machine love inhabiting an aberrant, abject space. In this way, while Yumi and Shimizu fear the breakdown of romance and the family, they are in reality further imbricating androids into positions of inferiority. The Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic, in this case, is both gendered and functions through internalized misogyny and patriarchal gender dynamics.

This section has made it clear the narrative of *Chobits* stages a battle of romance between human women and android women. Women in the text are made out to despise human-robot out of fear that they will get cycled out in favor of lovers which would more efficiently satisfy male desire. This is to say, Personcoms are easier to love, and also, easier to control. It is made all the clearer then, that within the Japanese pop culture imagination, science fiction works do not point towards a post-gender world, but instead invest all the more aggressively into gender status quos. These fictions predict a



world in which gender does not disappear, but rather, is re-created by men who desire gender relations uncomplicated by posthumanism. The women of *Chobits* do not want Personcoms to replace them as romantic partners, and as such, think of Personcoms as abject and themselves as superior, creating a hierarchy of love.

### 3.6 Conclusion: Affective Terminals

I would like to conclude this chapter with a discussion of emotions. In chapters One and Two I discussed affect and affective control as both means of dehumanizing humans and controlling posthuman bodies. In *Chobits* the concept of posthumans having emotions figures in certain character moments, and I argue, underscores many of the points this chapter has made. In the very last episode, Hideki triggers a protocol within Chi that initiates a global event effecting Persocoms. We learn that Chi has some connection to the Persocom network, or at least the ability to influence other Persocoms, in Episode 20. In this episode, the audience sees Chi in an altered state, as she is undergoing a personal realization of her true identity. She stands on top of a streetlamp, clothing waving mysteriously, as all Persocoms in the area simultaneously deactivate. When Chi leaves, they eventually awaken, with no memory of what happened. At the end of the final episode of the anime, the event which Hideki triggers changes all Persocoms in the world: their eyes suddenly become brighter and more detailed. One could say that they become more human-like. Right after this happens, Zima, the male Personcom, turns to Dita when her eyes begin to water, which causes her face to redden in embarrassment: "Why are you getting all red-you're just a Persocom."<sup>113</sup> I thus suggest that Chi's final "awakening" gave Persocoms affect: the ability to feel and read emotions.

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<sup>113</sup> *Chobits*, "The Person Only For Chi." Directed by Asaka Morio. Produced by Ono Tatsuya, Sekido Yuichi, Gensho Tetsuo. Animax, September 24, 2002.

As I have written in previous chapters, drawing from Orbaugh's work, human experience is defined as being within a sphere of affection: to be able to sense and express emotion, verbally or non-verbally. Therefore, this affect-bestowing event at the end of *Chobits* could be the transformation of Persocoms from pure machines into more human-like beings. In other words, the addition of affect to these artificial beings makes them into true posthumans which further transgress the boundaries between human and non-human. However, this is the point where the text ends; the future beyond this event is left ambiguous. There is no epilogue showing the result of a world filled with affective androids. For that matter, Chi and Hideki are presumed to become a romantic couple in a more open capacity, fulfilling Hideki's desire to incorporate her into his *ie* and a traditional framework of gender roles. There is no evidence that this global event will change gender and labor relations between humans and Persocoms, so if it is meant to be a moment of liberation, it ends up being a flaccid gesture.

Thus, we can consider this in two sorts of stages. In the world of *Chobits* before the ending, Persocoms were kept outside of affect, and therefore, outside of what is human. This is another example of Othering and dehumanization. Keeping a group of people, or in this case an entire class of beings, in a category outside of what is considered human, it becomes easier to control them, for they do not have the backing of institutional power. However, giving Persocoms affect after the class and gendered hierarchies of humans and Persocoms have become a systemic issue, in my opinion, changes nothing. In this case, Persocoms are changed from feminine android servants to posthuman women, but without institutional changes in the way that society is organized (i.e. patriarchy) there cannot be expected to be any kind of meaningful changes in the ways that Persocoms operate in the world. While human society is structured with a gendered hierarchy down to the roots, gender remains a primary means of controlling populations: posthuman or not. As such, we can think of this as a

kind of refutation of Orbaugh's point: that affect does not, in fact, quantify a measure of humanity. It simply describes a particular *version* of humanity, which itself is a multivalent category which patriarchy utilizes to keep certain bodies and subjectivities powerless. Therefore, while *Chobits* gestures towards transcendence, its ideas surrounding gender trap its posthuman women into positions of bondage.

## AFTERWORD

The purpose of this thesis has been to make a specific argument about Japanese media. By examining four case studies, I have identified a thematic trend in Japanese science fiction anime, specifically within the realm of posthuman fictions. I have argued that certain power hierarchies between humans and non-humans exist, and they take the form of domination of the former over the later. I have named this phenomenon the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic, but in truth, this is simply a renaming of an existing relationship between bodies and power: those with power use it to bend those without to their will. In this case, those without power are hybrid, posthuman beings: “chimera” of machine and human. Regardless, they are acted upon by power in the same way as humans have dominated other humans throughout history. The Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic is simply the logic of domination transplanted into Japanese media works which feature the blurring of traditional notions of subjectivity and personhood.

The four anime works that I have brought into this thesis, in my estimation, most clearly exemplify this particular power-dynamic. *Ergo Proxy* represents a “pure” master-slave dynamic, in which “humans” wield institutional power over “androids.” What makes this work interesting, however, is that *Ergo Proxy* seeks to undermine the solvency of this kind of relationship. In building a Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic, the series shows how unsustainable it is, as the dynamic is predicated upon an exclusive and illusory conception of the human. Both *Gunslinger Girl* and *Mahoromatic* find their master-slave dynamics set through the lens of both gender and fascism. Fascist apparatuses of power use the bodies of women for the purpose of waging war and controlling society. When gender is entered into the mix, we find that the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic is more pernicious. Even in posthumanism, where the borders of

human and non-human blur, issues of gender and patriarchy do go away, but become replicated through new bodies and subjects. Finally, in *Chobits* the master-slave dynamic becomes the most abstracted. There is a relation of power between humans and non-humans, but it becomes closer to a power-hierarchy between men and women. Through sexuality and the control of sexual bodies, human-men wield social power over android-women, resulting in a system which privileges the voice and actions of men over that of women. The through line of this project is that, while the Posthuman Master-Slave Dynamic changes in its form from work to work, at its core it outlines the control of posthuman bodies by human masters. Within posthuman, “real world” power structures do not disappear but are simply replicated.

However, as in all academic endeavors the question which remains is: why does it matter? To answer this I will resort, again, to Donna Haraway. In the “Cyborg Manifesto” Haraway argues that “the difference between social reality and science fiction is an optical illusion.”<sup>114</sup> This is to say, that science fiction presents us with a vision of our current realities and our fears for the future. What is recreated within fiction is not merely gesture towards that which exists in the real world, but a facsimile of what matters and what is scary. To iterate an earlier point in this project, robots and androids “reflect what we want to become and what we afraid of becoming.” Therefore, to see power dynamics within Japanese science fiction, we must then think that the loss of control over bodies and the domination of women by men are things which are intrinsically important to culture. Whether by conservative or progressive-minded creators (the distinction becomes muddied in collaborative media such as anime) these realities, though refracted through the prism of science fiction, are aspects of real fear and consideration. As such, to study media critically is to study culture, and to better see

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<sup>114</sup> Haraway, Donna. “A Manifesto for Cyborgs.” *The Cybercultures Reader*, Routledge: 2000, 291.

what people are doing and where they think they are going. In other words, historical trauma is readily distilled into literature and media, and it is important to consider these things as both reactions to and products of culture and history.

Media Studies, especially of Japanese new media, is a flourishing field. As such, there is always room for new interpretations of works both older and contemporary. Additionally, as with any highly focused study, there are avenues of research and interrogation that I have not taken. I believe, however, that the critical analysis of posthuman themes in both Japanese media and literature should continue. For instance, this study is focused entirely upon anime, to the exception of manga, video games, and other areas of visual pop culture and new media. Future study would benefit greatly from exploring different mediums, so as to either hone this study's thesis regarding posthuman master-slave relationships or to find newer and better interpretations of cultural works. In a similar vein, works both more contemporary and older should be studied with the same level of scrutiny. I have chosen the four works in this study for reasons of close thematic linkages, making it easier to see the patterns and points of comparison. I have also limited the time period in which works were chosen, so as to attempt some manner of historicization. Through examining power dynamics and hierarchies in Japanese media works on a longer timeline, it would be possible to see changes in posthuman expression and representation, along with the changing dynamics of power within these works. It would, for example, be fruitful to examine Heisei Era new media as a totality, seeing how the year of this thesis' publication, 2019, marks the end of the Heisei and the beginning of a new imperial Era.

The theories behind certain disclosures are always changing, and as such new methodologies are also important to seeing the ways in which gender and posthumanism interact and collide. At the intersection of New Media Studies and Queer and Feminist Theory, many fascinating findings hide. To further understand the ways in

which power structures and gender hierarchies are reproduced in media, it's important to approach these works from marginalized viewpoints. As such, diverse and progressively-minded scholars would do well to examine Japanese media works in this sort of critical light. In that case, radical new disclosures could help bring nuance to our common understandings of posthumanism and posthuman modes of being.

In a near-completely technologically mediated society, it is easy to uncritically accept posthumanism as a lived reality. As I have previously outlined, within the postmodern era we see the death of grand narratives; in a way, posthumanism serves as a replacement, helping people to negotiate modern life within a new framework. With hybrid identities people are able to relate to technology and the world with sense of self and individuality. And while it is the case that the social and object relations of modern people are radically changed through the interface of human and technology, certain realities tend to get lost in the shuffle. Jennifer Robertson concludes *Robo Sapiens Japonicus* with the sentence, "there should always be a gap--"not too big, not too small"--between dreams of the future and everyday realities, lest the former displace and make the later invisible."<sup>115</sup> This kind of material understanding of technology and culture is vital: we must always strive to leave room for the future, while at the same time attending to social realities.

A failure in this regard can be seen in the failed *Henna hoteru*, or "Strange Hotel" in Nagasaki, Japan. According to a 2019 Verge article, the Strange Hotel, which had boasted 243 function robots performing myriad duties throughout the hotel, had to "lay off" half of its robot workforce. Originally, the hotel was designed with the goal of optimal efficiency, with the thought that a purely automated workforce would be better than a biological one. However, the hotel robots grew old and began to malfunction, making the

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<sup>115</sup> Robertson, *Sapiens*, 192

process of operating the hotel much more of a headache than the hotel could manage. These robots, according to the article, were then to be replaced by humans, coming full circle.<sup>116</sup> The limits of technology and the technological imagination, at least in our current age, makes it clear that certain realities create this “gap” between the future we want and the present we have. This is to say, the *Henna hoteru* may help us understand that we cannot leave behind certain embodied realities; the “real world” exists even if we try to ignore it for design around it

This thesis has made one thing clear above all else: in posthumanism, power structures and lived realities remain, if abstracted and changed. Patriarchy is not elided but replicated. Women’s bodies continue to be utilized by power as apparatuses of social organization, and vessels for masculine-desire and sexuality. In addition to this, fascism remains, and through the aestheticization of politics, art and artificially reproduced bodies serve to protect the status quo. The promise of new geographies of the self and of pushing the boundaries of what is human should not smokescreen the persistent realities of sexism and patriarchy. It is ultimately important to understand that media reflects and refracts social realities and desires, and yet, that the poetics of works should not serve to erase the politics of the everyday. Everything may feel like the future, but the “us” which is oppressed by apparatuses of power should not be ignored. It is only then that the posthuman dream of social and bodily freedom can be won.

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<sup>116</sup> The Verge, <https://www.theverge.com/2019/1/15/18184198/japans-robot-hotel-lay-off-work-for-humans>, Shannon Liao, Accessed 2/10/19



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